

A man of two worlds:

A. G. van Hamel

**celtivist
and germanist**

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editors

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The sea is calm as far as the eye can see
Yet time and again, out of sheer play
And white-winged with hubris, waves rise high
And rejoice in sunshine, when submerged
The black rock stands ashamed of its concealment

His spite shatters their pent-up strength
Mindlessly they dissolve back into the tide
The high rock stands stern and sees them fall
But I do know that the brief rise before failing
Was boundless, fair and bright

Such do I desire that one day my end shall be
My doom awaits like that dark stone stands
But high would I raise myself from the seas
And crowned in festive white oppose its opposition
Having been bright by the light of my thoughts

AG van Hamel,

Ballyferriter

8 Aug. 08

De zee is vlak zoover ik voor me zie
Maar telkens rijzen hoog uit louter speling
En wit gekruind van overmoed de golven
En juichen op van zonnigheid wanneer bedolven
De zwarte rots zich schaamt om zijn verheling

Zijn nijd verbreekt hun opgeloken kracht
Gedachtenloos verdwijnen ze in de strooming
De hoge rots staat star en ziet ze dalen
Maar ik weet dat het kort verrijzen voor dat falen
Schoon is geweest en schitt'rend zonder tooming

Zoo wil ik ook dat eens mijn eind zal zijn
Mijn lot staat als zie die donk're steen te wachten
Maar hoog wil ik me heffen uit de zeeën
En wit getooid tot feest dien tegenstand vertreeën
En schoon geweest zijn door het licht van mijn gedachten

AG van Hamel,

Ballyferriter

8 Aug. 08

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Preface

The year 2023 marks the 100th anniversary of the study of the Celtic languages and cultures at Utrecht University. In 1923, the mandate of the professor of Old Germanic, A. G. van Hamel, was extended by Royal Decree to include the study of the Celtic languages. Upon Van Hamel's sudden death in 1945, Celtic briefly disappeared from Utrecht, in favour of Old Germanic. The Faculty of Letters even claimed that the addition of the Celtic languages to the curriculum in 1923 had been based on a misunderstanding.

Fortunately, the happy accidents continued over the years that followed. With the appointment of Van Hamel's student Maartje Draak as lecturer (1950), and then professor (1957) at the same university, Celtic acquired an independent chair, no longer linked to Old Germanic. Maartje Draak's own succession and that of her successor Doris Edel were not without their difficulties either, but they did eventually come to pass, with the result that Celtic at Utrecht University has successfully managed to make its way into the international university of the twenty-first century. While it remains a comparatively small discipline in terms of its student numbers, it extends over a large, interdisciplinary field of study, covered by no fewer than four tenured academic posts.

A hundred years may seem like a short time, but reading this book reveals, above all, how much times have changed. Anton Gerard van Hamel was a child of the Belle Époque, raised in an affluent and distinguished family before the First World War. He grew up to be a classic example of the gentleman scholar: affable, speaking his foreign languages (as an adult, he would go on to learn to speak Welsh, Irish, Icelandic and even a little Breton), establishing many loyal international friendships, and engaging academically in a range of fields inconceivable in this day and age. With a strong aversion to the excesses of the blunt and in particular German nationalism, which was unleashed on Europe and which would go on to destroy his world between the thirties and 1945, and with it, himself.

In this sense, Van Hamel represents a lost world. But in other respects, he was someone who would be quite at home in modern academia: he linked the academic study of what we would now call intangible heritage to a great civic commitment to knowledge and the understanding of other languages and cultures in the modern world, in his case the languages and cultures of Wales, Ireland and Iceland, which were considered to be exotic destinations from a Dutch perspective in the interwar period. An advocate for cross-cultural exchange, he took an active part in political and civic debates and invited students to join him on his intellectual and physical travels. The best example of the latter must certainly be the fact that Van Hamel successfully managed to recruit Dutch students to help Icelandic farmers make hay, thereby immersing them deeply in a foreign world, as Arend Quak recounts in his contribution to this volume.

It is an honour for me to be included in the long line of his successors. I congratulate the editors and authors of this volume on their successful foray into the world of A. G. van Hamel.

Peter Schrijver, 3 March 2023

Introduction and sources

In 1923, Anton Gerard Van Hamel (1886-1945) became the first professor of Celtic studies in Utrecht and the Netherlands. This means that in 2023, both the chair and the study of Celtic as a Dutch academic discipline will have existed for 100 years, a milestone that could never have been achieved without Van Hamel. It is thanks to him that the study of the Celtic languages and cultures is strongly rooted in the Netherlands, in spite of an occasionally troubled history. Anyone familiar with the ups and downs of Celtic studies in Utrecht will know that its existence was threatened several times, but each time it managed to survive, not in the least because of the broad academic and popular support it has acquired both at home and abroad over the past 100 years.

Van Hamel could not have foreseen in 1923 that his promotion to professor of Celtic studies would establish such a long and rich tradition: at the time, his interest in the field was exceptional, for until he entered the scene, the discipline had been marginal at best in the Netherlands. That he was able to develop this interest, first in himself and then in Utrecht and the Netherlands, can be attributed to his personal passion and initiative,¹ but the establishment of the chair of Celtic was ultimately made possible primarily because Van Hamel had become professor of Old Germanic earlier in 1923. Celtic was added to his brief later that year.² This combination of the two disciplines was inextricably linked to Van Hamel, who had practised both from his student days onwards, and who was now able to pursue his deep passion for both fields of study. This afforded him a unique position, both in the Netherlands and abroad, as one who studied both Old Germanic and Celtic languages and literatures at an international academic level. His activities were not limited to scholarly publications, and he also frequented lecture halls and engaged in popular activities. Van Hamel valued public outreach long before this came into fashion.

Because of his fascination for and his bringing together of Old Germanic and Celtic studies, Van Hamel may rightly be called a ‘man of two worlds’. While this volume centres on Van Hamel’s work as a celticist, we will in no way neglect his work in the field of Old Germanic studies. We will observe Van Hamel from his childhood days, as a scion of a distinguished family,³ who, while



► Fig. 1. Van Hamel sporting a moustache, perhaps in the 1910s. The Hague, Nationaal Archief, 2.21.081 (Archief van J.A. van Hamel), no. 290.

studying Dutch, took an unusual interest in the Celtic languages. We follow him on his travels to Wales, and read about his correspondence with his Welsh teacher, Henry Parry-Williams. When he then heads for Ireland, we watch him immerse himself in Modern Irish at Ballyferriter in Co. Kerry, and establish both personal and academic relations. He strikes up a life-long friendship with Richard Irvine Best, director of the National Library of Ireland, as evidenced by their extensive correspondence. We also witness Van Hamel facing criticism and setbacks in his personal and academic life, until his ambitions were finally fulfilled in Utrecht. This does not mean that all his troubles were suddenly over, but his persistence, passion for his fields of study and the support of others enabled Van Hamel to establish and maintain his reputation both nationally and internationally. His notebooks testify to his commitment to mastering Old Irish grammar, and we follow his career as an editor of Old Irish texts. We cover his relatively brief surge of interest in Breton, a subject later taken up by his pupil Theodor Chotzen. His interest in the literary traditions about King Arthur was more sustained, and would go on to inspire his other pupil and later successor Maartje Draak. With this latter interest of Van Hamel, we cross over into his work on Old Germanic, and this volume is the first

¹ See Draak 1947, 71-74, on what attracted Van Hamel so strongly to Celtic studies and why he found its practice so important; a motivation which centred on the complex, ‘irrational’ Celtic worldview and sense of unity, and the rediscovery of experience, rapture and intuition (as opposed to the Greco-Roman emphasis on the analytical). Old Germanic studies must have held a similar attraction for him.

² See Bart Jaski’s contribution ‘That mad ambition of mine’: A. G. van Hamel in Bonn during the First World War’ in this volume.

³ Jaski 2023.



▲ Fig. 2. Title page of *Een jaarkring in legendes*, published in 1948 (private collection).

to closely examine his long career in that field, with a special focus on his great love of Iceland.

Over and across the various chapters, several aspects of Van Hamel's personality and pursuits are brought to the fore, highlighting aspects of his career that have previously been overlooked. The main texts on his life, written by Maartje Draak and by Marc Schneiders,⁴ have already broached the key issues. Some other authors also mention Van Hamel in specific contexts, but this volume is the first to attempt to offer an in-depth and diverse account of Van Hamel as a scholar and an individual. That said, much remains to be uncovered. In terms of his academic activities, this concerns, for instance, his role as a reviewer. Van Hamel has some 250 publications to his name,⁵ 138 of which are reviews. This raises questions as to which books Van Hamel opted to review, and with which angle, when compared to contemporaries who discussed the same books, and whether he was any more critical of 'competitors', such as Julius Pokorny or Jan de Vries, than of others.⁶ His views on and substantial contributions to certain areas of study also await closer inspection, such as Celtic, Germanic and Indo-European linguistics;⁷ medieval Irish annals and pseudo-historical works such as *Lebor gabála* and *Lebor Breatnach*; sagas, legends and fairy tales with their associated themes and issues in the Celtic and Germanic languages. Additionally, there is the by no means insignificant role he played in organising

popularising activities and promoting publications on Ireland and Iceland, including his editorial work on such publications as *De tuin der goden* ('The garden of the gods', 1940 and posthumously, 1947) and *Een jaarkring in legendes* ('Calendar legends', posthumously, 1948), both intended for a general audience.

Van Hamel was not an ivory-tower academic, although one may be tempted to assume this based on his publications in a wide range of leading international journals such as *Acta philologica Scandinavica*, *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, *English studies*, *Études celtiques*, *Journal of English and Germanic philology*, *Revue celtique* and *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*. He is also the only Dutchman to have delivered the Sir John Rhÿs Memorial Lecture (in 1934), which was published in the *Proceedings of the British Academy*.⁸ Van Hamel also published widely in Dutch, in journals such as *Mededeelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandsche Akademie van Wetenschappen, Afd. Letterkunde* (of which he was a member), *Museum*, *Neophilologus* (of which he was an editor), *Onze eeuw*, *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse taal- en letterkunde*, *Vragen des tijds*, *De witte mier* and even in *Tijdschrift voor parapsychologie*. But he also wrote monographs, text editions, handbooks and contributions to larger volumes, as well as newspaper articles and even entries in the AVRO's *Radiobode* (a radio station magazine). Accordingly, we may safely say that Van Hamel catered to a wide-ranging audience, and must therefore have been a relatively well-known professor, who successfully propagated his areas of expertise.

Of course, an academic career is not confined to publications or lectures alone. Van Hamel's role as a teacher and supervisor of students, in regard to Celtic, of Theodor Chotzen and his later successor Maartje Draak in particular,⁹ could be explored in greater detail. His letters to Draak are an especially rich source of information.¹⁰ Van Hamel also served on the faculty board, right up to the Second World War, and arranged safe houses for at least two students during the war.¹¹ Van Hamel's position and standing within academic circles in Utrecht is all the more significant because it helps contextualise an incident that nearly ended his career and consequently imperilled the very existence of the chair in Celtic. Because this incident had a significant impact on Van Hamel's life and the full story is little known, we will discuss it in some detail.

⁴ Draak 1947; 1951 (revised edition in 1977, 43-59, 177-179); Schneiders 1995, 2002. See also the list in Schneiders and Veelenturf 1992, 150 (that list also refers to the unsigned article 'Anton Gerardus van Hamel' in *Neophilologus* 30 (1946) 2-3, written by the Amsterdam-based Germanist Jan Hendrik Scholte, see NA 307). In addition, see Dijkhuis 1945a and 1945b (both in NA 307), Hammerich 1947, Jóhannesson 1946 (clipping in NA 307, with a separate French translation). A typewritten six-page 'In memoriam Van Hamel' by C. G. N. de Vooys, delivered at the mourning session of the senate of Utrecht University on 26-11-1945, may also be found in NA 307.

⁵ See the bibliography at the end of this volume. Over a hundred are (partly) related to the field of Celtic studies.

⁶ For more on these, see the articles by Nike Stam and Alderik Blom in this volume.

⁷ See, for example, Frýba-Reber 1994, 44-55, and 213-215, who offers a transcript of a draft of a letter from the Swiss linguist Albert Sechehayé (1870-1946) to Van Hamel, then secretary-general of the Comité International Permanent des Linguistes, founded in The Hague in 1928.

⁸ Van Hamel 1934c.

⁹ Toorians and Veelenturf 1993; Gerritsen 2009.

¹⁰ For example, his postcards and letters to Maartje Draak are all found in UBU, Archief Draak, C 4. Van Hamel's other female students in Old Germanic studies included Petronella Maria (Nel) Boer-den Hoed (1899-1973), later professor of Scandinavian language and literature at the University of Amsterdam, and Elisabeth Johanna Gras (dissertation 1931).

¹¹ According to Schneiders 2002. He was also a member of the Utrecht university professors' association DECEM (see UBU, Hs. 34 A 13-14), and served as chairman of the Faculty of Letters for some years, but was passed over for the position of rector, see Van Walsum 1995, 94.

In late October 1928, Van Hamel, then 42 years old, had taken an unemployed, nineteen-year-old boy home with him on multiple occasions and handed him substantial sums of money. The boy's fellows began to pressure and extort 'Loetje', as Van Hamel was known to them, once they realised that he was a man of standing and repute. They started harassing him and one of them caused such a ruckus at his home that Van Hamel rang the police in desperation. During the investigation, the nineteen-year-old boy stated that he had performed sexual acts with Van Hamel. Van Hamel was instantly accused of violating the law under section 248bis, which banned adults from engaging in acts of fornication with a minor of the same sex. Under the circumstances, one was considered to be a minor when under twenty-one years of age, but under sixteen in case of heterosexual intercourse. Until 1971, when the law was repealed, the maximum penalty for this crime was to be incarcerated for four years, but sentences generally ranged from three to six months in jail. The court found Van Hamel guilty on account of the boy's testimony, but the sentence was relatively mild: Van Hamel was given the choice between a fine or ten days' detention. Acting in part at the urging of Piet Meertens (1899-1985), the founder of the later Meertens Instituut, but then working at the University Library, Van Hamel decided to appeal the judgment. He had always denied the allegations and claimed that he had been suppressing his homosexual proclivities for the past fifteen years. A psychiatrist considered Van Hamel to be homoerotically inclined: he was attracted to men but did not seek sexual gratification. Van Hamel was eventually acquitted on 21 March 1929. In the meantime, the university's Board of Trustees had advised Van Hamel to resign, and intended to suspend him otherwise. When the Public Prosecutor's Service proceeded to prosecute him, he was advised to take a leave of absence, in order to avoid risking measures such as being denied access to lectures and the potential for negative publicity. And so it was that Van Hamel was given leave until 1 June; this was later extended.

After his acquittal, Van Hamel requested that his leave be withdrawn, but this was not readily granted. The court in Utrecht had passed on a copy of various files from the case to the trustees, who worried that Van Hamel could be a danger to his male students and that his behaviour was unworthy of a professor. The matter was referred to the minister of Education, and Van Hamel was summoned to him. The minister would have liked to fire Van Hamel, but the majority of the Board of Trustees felt that this would have been an excessive measure, given that Van Hamel's clarifications did not, strictly speaking, provide any grounds for such a move. In fact, the Faculty of Letters wished Van Hamel's leave

of absence to be lifted as soon as possible. Meanwhile, Van Hamel's students had started to become agitated, and in late April 45 students signed a petition to the Board of Trustees, drafted by Meertens, asking for Van Hamel to be allowed to resume his lectures. There was even talk of a rally. However, the minister refused to budge. He made inquiries about Van Hamel's conduct, but these did not provide him with any incriminating evidence. Similarly, the academic senate decided in late July that there were no grounds for Van Hamel's dismissal, and the minister was finally forced to lift Van Hamel's leave of absence. The minister did remark pointedly that the Board of Trustees was responsible for supervising professors, thus relegating this vexed issue back to the university. Meanwhile, Van Hamel was staying in Iceland and did not submit a reply until September, vowing to continue to refrain from 'improper urges'.

Even then, Van Hamel was not entirely in the clear. One of the trustees, the politician A. I. M. J. baron van Wijnbergen, raised the matter in the Lower House of Parliament in December 1929. This did not lead to any formal action, but the newspapers picked up the story about a 'Utrecht professor', although Van Hamel's name was not mentioned. In April 1930, Van Wijnbergen asked the university for a reply, and the Faculty of Letters informed him that 'the moral position of professor Van Hamel is not in the least shaken, but on the contrary, he rejoices in the general sympathy and esteem of his colleagues and pupils'.¹² Van Hamel had been deeply humiliated, but had ultimately managed to retain his position.

An account of the proceedings is provided by Theo van der Meer, based on archival records in Het Utrechts Archief.¹³ Van der Meer also refers to Meertens' diary, for Meertens had been aware of accounts of Van Hamel's 'intimate life' even before the incident, and noted that Van Hamel occasionally surrendered to his feelings.¹⁴ This would seem to be confirmed by other sources not consulted by Van der Meer. In particular, this concerns Van Hamel's 'Diary' in which he composed a number of homoerotic poems,¹⁵ including some about his encounters with young men in Prague and Paris in the early 1920s.¹⁶ Given that several ambiguities remain, the matter merits further study.

Nevertheless, the events do make it clear that Van Hamel enjoyed the support of his students and fellow professors, and other sources confirm that he was widely loved and respected. That people even stood up for him in the face of allegations of being a practising homosexual (with individuals who were legally underage) further underlines this, because even in the roaring twenties, this was far from accepted in a Netherlands that was

¹² '[...] de moreele positie van den hoogleeraar Van Hamel niet in het minst is geschokt, maar dat deze zich integendeel in de algemeene sympathie en hoogachting zijner ambtgenooten en leerlingen verheugt [...].'

¹³ Van der Meer 2011a.

¹⁴ Van der Meer 2011a, 89. The diary may be found in de Collectie P. J. Meertens of the Amsterdam University Library. Meertens would later face similar accusations himself, see Van der Meer 2011b.

¹⁵ Its existence was already reported in Schneiders 2002.

¹⁶ See, for example, Dagboek ('Diary'), NA, 298, pp. 109-117. The poems were even typed out by Van Hamel, see UBU, Archief Van Hamel, H 3.



◀ Fig. 3. Van Hamel smoking a cigarette and accompanied by an unknown fellow passenger in front of a KLM Fokker VIIA, second half of the 1920s. The Hague, Nationaal Archief, 2.21.081 (Archief van J.A. van Hamel), no. 290.

still Christian and conservative. It may also explain why Van Hamel comes across as a tormented soul in his poems (again, especially in his ‘Diary’). They reveal a man struggling with himself, with loneliness, with his feelings, with God and with thoughts of death. On 9 November 1931, for instance, he writes the following in ‘In koorts’ (‘In fever’):

To pass away forgotten is all I ask:
Never have I troubled God with prayer,
Patiently have I suffered every day,
And do not think, men, that I complain.

To me my life is simply a scourge,
I find it without purpose and without reason;
Now at last I long for that long peace...
Is that too much? I wanted it so dearly.¹⁷

Maartje Draak says that although Van Hamel had published some poems (‘Verzen (van dood en zonde)’, i.e. ‘Verses (of death and sin)’),¹⁸ he had kept most of them to himself, ‘and this – to my mind – rightly so. For Van Hamel’s strophes certainly demonstrate a talent for versifying, but not the need to express himself as a poet’.¹⁹ He expressed himself mainly to himself, and to those few with whom he felt a special connection. Most of the people around him, however kind and friendly, could not give him the affection he longed for.

In more ways than one, Van Hamel was a man of two worlds. To outsiders, he was likely a sympathetic, help-

ful and hard-working scholar, but inwardly he found himself trapped on all sides between his feelings, his reputation and his societal standing. This too makes Van Hamel such an intriguing figure, and the present volume cannot do justice to his life in all of its facets. Several of these facets converge in the description of Van Hamel by Louis Leonor Hammerich (1892-1975), professor of Germanic linguistics in Copenhagen and with an interest in Dutch, who would briefly succeed Van Hamel as professor in 1946. In 1925, Hammerich went to Hilversum for a sabbatical. In their memoirs, his wife Clara recounts their visit to ‘Ton’ van Hamel in Utrecht:

We were then also invited to his home, where he lived with his mother in one of the old parts of the city. The mother was a gentle and very sympathetic lady, who spoke French to me and had fine French wine served. Ton fetched his cello and played beautifully for us. In spite of his great erudition, he was something of a bohemian, quite unlike his brother, the high commissioner in Danzig. Ton was no beauty, a little clumsy, a little red-faced, a little sickly, but with the most faithful, blue eyes and of an unrivalled helpfulness towards us.²⁰

The sources

Upon Van Hamel’s sudden death in late 1945, many of his private papers were inherited by his brother Joost, a lawyer of international repute. Consequently, they became part of his estate, now held by the Nationaal Archief (the Dutch ‘National Archives’).²¹ Van Hamel’s

¹⁷ Dagboek (‘Diary’), NA, 298, p. 134. Also to be found in UBU, Archief Van Hamel, A 31, p. 38. ‘Vergeten heengaan is al wat ik vraag: Nooit heb ik God gehinderd met gebeden, Geduldig heb ik iedren dag geleden, En denkt ook nog niet, menschen, dat ik klaag. Mijn leven is nu eenmaal jijn een plaag, Ik zie het zonder doel en zonder reden; Nu hoop ik eindlijk op den langen vrede ... Is dat te veel? Ik wilde het zoo graag’.

¹⁸ Van Hamel 1920e.

¹⁹ Draak 1947, 77: ‘en dit - naar het mij wil voorkomen - terecht. Want zeker getuigen Van Hamel’s strophen van een vers-gevoelige begaafdheid, echter niet van de noodwendigheid zich als dichter te uiten’.

²⁰ Hammerich 1973, 73: ‘Vi blev så også inviteret hjem til ham, der boede sammen med sin mor i et af byens gamle kvarterer. Moderen var en mild og meget sympatisk dame, talte fransk til mig og lod servere fin, fransk vin. Ton hentede sin cello og spillede kønt for os. Han var trods sin megen lærdom noget af en bohème, en hel modsætning til sin bror, højkommissæren i Dantzic. Ton var ingen skønhedsåbenbaring, lidt klodset, lidt rød-blisset, lidt mavesvær, men med de mest trohjertige, blå øjne og af en hjælp-somhed uden lige over for os’.

²¹ The Hague, Nationaal Archief, 2.21.081 (Archief van J.A. van Hamel), 290-307.

estate includes many personal documents, such as his 'Diary'; correspondence, mainly from his younger years, but also with a number of foreign scholars; and drafts of articles he was working on shortly before his passing.

Van Hamel's books were transferred to the Utrecht University Library, where they still form the nucleus of the library's Celtic collection.²² These included a number of lecture transcripts and notes,²³ the outline of a publication entitled 'De beschaving der Kelten' ('The Civilisation of the Celts'),²⁴ and a nineteenth-century manuscript containing the Cornish text 'Mount Calvary or History of the Passion' by John Keigwin, dating back to 1682, accompanied by an English translation.²⁵

Van Hamel's academic estate became fragmented. In 2007, Bart Jaski happened upon three boxes containing documents by Van Hamel in the archives of the department of Celtic studies stored in the university's general archives. The departmental archive was to be transferred to Het Utrechts Archief in due course. However, since these documents belonged to a professor's personal archives, they were instead transferred to the Utrecht University Library and inventoried by Arwen van Zanten, who volunteered for the job. Finally, Maartje Draak's archives also turned out to include documents from Van Hamel's estate. Draak's archives were transferred to the University Library by her associate Frida de Jong in 2021. De Jong had already inventoried and classified these archives, allowing these materials to be put to use in the studies included in this volume right away. Any boxes containing documents by Van Hamel are now stored in the Archief Van Hamel.²⁶ In general, this section of Van Hamel's archives focuses mainly on preliminary work for academic publications and notes on various topics, most of them relating to Celtic studies.²⁷

Much has also been lost. For instance, while we do have Van Hamel's letters to Maartje Draak, we do not have her letters to him.²⁸ Similarly, while his letters to R. I. Best in Dublin have survived, only a few of Best's replies remain.²⁹ On the other hand, we do, for example, have letters from Van Hamel to Henry Parry-Williams in Wales and to three Icelandic scholars.³⁰ In the end, the story of Van Hamel's life and career can only be told on the basis of what sources and memoirs now remain. Fortunately, this still leaves plenty, even for future studies.

Accordingly, we very much look forward to the next hundred years, and would like to take this opportunity to thank a number of people and trusts who have enabled us to celebrate 100 years of Celtic in this fashion. First of all, we would like to express our thanks to the authors of this volume for their contributions, and in particular to Angharad Price, who had to write her piece at lightning speed, and to Mícheál Ó Flaithearta, for informing us of Angharad Price's work with Van Hamel's correspondence; to Peter Schrijver for his eloquent preface, and to Ranke de Vries for her contribution to the translation of this volume, and to the board of the Stichting A. G. van Hamel as well as Linus Band and Daan van Loon for their input on the anniversary celebrations. Thanks also to Geert Goorhuis (Utrecht University Library) for transcribing many documents in the collections held at the Utrecht University Library and the Nationaal Archief, and Arwen van Zanten for preparing an inventory of the Archief Van Hamel in the Utrecht University Library, her help with the Van Hamel papers in the Nationaal Archief and transcribing Van Hamel's letters to Maartje Draak. To employees of the Utrecht University Library for their efforts in making available and scanning various documents. Also, of course, to the archivists at the National Library of Ireland in Dublin and the Nationaal Archief in The Hague, and Bertram Maurits of the Literatuurmuseum in The Hague. We would also like to express our great thanks to the following trusts for their financial support: the Maartje Draak Fonds of the Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen for the printing and translation of the Dutch version of this biography, and the Irish Embassy in The Hague for the printing of the English-language edition. For the funding of our outreach events, we extend our thanks to the Prof. van Winterfonds, the JAN Alumnifonds, the Department of Languages, Literature and Communication of Utrecht University, the Gilles Hondius Foundation, the Fentener van Vlissingenfonds, and the K. F. Heinfonds.

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²² See also Uit het Broek 2020. His books also contained a number of letters, now UBU, Hs. 19 A 2 (see Jaski 2008) and UBU, Hs. 19 A 6 (see Band-Dijkstra 2013), and notes, now UBU, Hs. 34 A 26.

²³ UBU, Hs. 11 D 20-21, all on the subject of Old Germanic, High German and Dutch, see Van der Horst 1994, 152-153.

²⁴ UBU, Hs. 12 A 9, which he had submitted to the editor Jan Willem Berkelbach van der Sprenkel in May 1944, but who died in December of that year. See also Draak 1947, 80.

²⁵ UBU, Hs. 12 A 12. It is a copy from Oxford, Bodleian Library, Gough Cornwall 3, with an ex libris by Davies Gilbert (who published an edition in 1826) and a label reading Trelissick library K 4. Van Hamel added a number of notes comparing the manuscript to Stokes' 1860-1861 edition.

²⁶ See <https://repertorium.library.uu.nl/collectie/van-hamel/> (accessed on 11-3-2023). The boxes are now subdivided into A-C (transferred from the university's general archives), D (Old Irish verbs) and E-H (from the Archief Draak), respectively.

²⁷ See, for example, Ranke de Vries' contribution to this volume.

²⁸ See note 7 above. The Utrecht University Library also holds some of Van Hamel's letters to various Utrecht scholars.

²⁹ See Nike Stam's contribution to this volume, who transcribed these letters in the NLI for this project.

³⁰ See the contributions by Angharad Price and Arend Quak in this volume, as well as Quak 2018.

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‘I am as yet incomplete’: A. G. van Hamel in his youth

BART JASKI

It is a familiar vexation for many a biographer that he or she knows so little, or at any rate not enough, about his subject’s childhood. Family life and important incidents which might have shaped his or her character and later ambitions and beliefs mostly remain hidden or are too anecdotal by nature to attach much value to or draw conclusions from. We know next to nothing about Van Hamel’s childhood either, other than the fact that Anton Gerard, born in Hilversum on 5 July 1886, was the youngest son of the legal scholar and politician Gerardus Antonius van Hamel (1842-1917) and Maria s’Jacob (1854-1928).

Anton Gerard was named after his uncle, and his older brother Joost Adriaan was named both after another uncle and his grandfather. Joost Adriaan van Hamel (1880-1964) obtained a doctorate in law from the University of Amsterdam in 1902 and succeeded his father as professor of criminal law in 1910. In 1914 he became editor-in-chief of *De (Groene) Amsterdammer*, and in 1917 he resigned as professor in order to focus on politics. During the First World War, he was staunchly anti-German. He later continued his legal career at the League of Nations, the precursor to the United Nations, founded in 1919.

Their mother had been born in the Dutch East Indies to a distinguished family, and their father Gerardus Antonius had six siblings, including a twin brother Antonius Gerardus (1842-1907). The latter had at first been a clergyman, but having lost his religious beliefs, he was appointed as the first professor of French in Groningen in 1884. He became known, among other things, for his Old French scholarship, such as his studies on *Cligès* and *Tristan* by Chrétien de Troyes.

In other words, Anton Gerard had been born into a prominent and affluent family,¹ and this provided him with both the background and the opportunities to pursue an academic career. But that he would set out on the path of Old Germanic and Celtic studies in so doing was by no means obvious. The former discipline was still fairly young; the latter did not exist, although a very few Dutch scholars were indirectly working on Celtic. There were many hurdles to overcome before Van Hamel was made professor of both disciplines in Utrecht in 1923 and thereby founded the field of Celtic studies in the Netherlands.



▲ Fig. 1. A. G. van Hamel in 1906, when he is about 20 years old. The Hague, Nationaal Archief, 2.21.081 (Archief van J.A. van Hamel), no. 290.

Travels

The first first-hand account we have of a youthful (Anton Gerard) Van Hamel derives from when he turns eighteen in July 1904 and goes abroad for his very first solo holiday. He stays in southern Switzerland at the De la Harpe household. His parents write to their youngest son every summer holiday up to 1910,² and their correspondence draws us into Van Hamel’s universe at the close of the Belle Époque, before the emergence of the international tensions that led up to the First World War. His parents write about the main issues on their minds. For instance, the letters from 1904 relate how his brother Addy (Joost Adriaan) heard a speech by Van Heutz, the new governor-general of the Dutch East Indies; some time later, Addy heads to Schaffhausen to meet Rie (his future wife Maria), after which they travel on to the vicinity of Sankt Moritz in Switzerland. Uncle Anton is staying in the Jura, and Aunt Gle (Celia) near Versailles. The parents themselves are forced to postpone

¹ See also Jaski 2023.

² Letters from his parents to VH, NA, 291.

their trip to Switzerland because of the elections. They are also friends of Francis William Reitz, an important politician both during and after the South African Boer War. A friend of Reitz's, Jacobus Coenraad Pretorius, who is studying medicine in Dublin, pays a visit.

Clearly, this is not your average family. Van Hamel grows up in a family with international political and academic relations, and everyone seems to spend their summers abroad. The distinguished academic careers of both his father and uncle, his father's political role (he was even considered for the post of prime minister in 1905), aided by his wife's contacts in the Dutch East Indies, and his brother's ambitions as a legal scholar cannot but have influenced the young Van Hamel. The urge to pursue a career of his own, to excel and make a name for himself, plays an important part in Van Hamel's academic career.

His father's letters are cordial but matter-of-fact. For example, he opens with 'Caro Tonio' and ends with 'Yours, Pater', as though unable to express his affection in Dutch. Van Hamel's mother has no such difficulties, calling her precious son *kindlief* ('darling child'), *lieveling* ('my darling') and *Teuntjelief* ('sweet little Anton'). She is constantly worried: 'Can I be very sure you won't do anything imprudent? Promise me that on your honour,' she writes in 1904.³ Especially his health worries her: does he need more stockings? Is his nasal solution prepared to prescription? In 1908, when Van Hamel is staying in Dublin, she urges him: '[...] to keep up all hygienic precautions - don't slacken! I am also in constant anxiety about the few clothes you have taken with you'.⁴ She considers the idea of her son being 'all alone on a remote island'⁵ (she is referring to Ireland) to be *onheimelijk* ('unsettling'). Are his accommodations *zindelijk* ('proper')? And does he remember to always boil the water? Van Hamel's close connection to his mother is a comfort to his father, who starts to suffer from ill health during this period. In 1908, he writes: 'It is a delightful thought to me that you are so deeply attached to your mother'.⁶ When his father finally succumbs in 1917, Van Hamel suffers a heavy blow. When his mother moves into the house at Prins Hendriklaan 19 in Utrecht in late 1923, Van Hamel moves in with her, and stays on even after her death in 1928.

Van Hamel is continually urged to ask for anything he may need, and should his money run out, more can be sent: 'don't be too stingy'.⁷ It is evident in other ways as well that the Van Hamels have few financial worries, and this is what enables Van Hamel to pursue an international academic career, spending his summers in London (1906), Wales (1907) and Ireland (1908). He makes several friends along the way.⁸ In 1909, he embarks at Southampton to sail to Genoa via Lisbon. He meets up with his parents in Como, who then move on to Tyrol and the Dolomites. A year later, he arranges to meet them in Stockholm, after first spending some time in Kristiania (now Oslo).⁹ 'Will I even recognise you with your long beard?', his mother wonders.¹⁰ Van Hamel clearly grows up in a family with a penchant for travelling, who love spending time in the mountains, and this fondness for rather more rugged terrain may explain why he was particularly drawn to Iceland himself.

Dutch studies

In 1904, before he made his first solo trip to Switzerland, Van Hamel had graduated from secondary school at the public Stedelijk (now: Barlaeus) Gymnasium in Amsterdam. Maartje Draak writes of that time that 'even then he [...] was already a boy who was not unwilling to be alone, engaged in various study pursuits. At first he felt drawn to astronomy, later to languages. He also had a great and devoted love for music from a very young age; he played the violin and played regularly'.¹¹ Up until the summer of 1906, Van Hamel had been taught by G. O. van 't Hooft for a dozen years.¹² Music was one of Van Hamel's greatest passions, and when he went on holiday in 1904, he borrowed a violin from the vicar, and his parents offered to send him strings. Van Hamel's playing of the violin is also mentioned in his correspondence with others, such as the various friends he made while travelling. His academic encounters also reveal that Van Hamel was (more) easily able to make contacts and be appreciated on account of his musical skills.¹³

After the summer of 1904, Van Hamel begins studying Dutch language and literature at the (Municipal) University of Amsterdam. He obtains a room at Nicolaas Witsenkade 48, right on the southern Singelgracht, and becomes a member of the Westersch Litterarisch Dis-

³ Letters from his parents to VH, NA, 291: 'Ben ik er heel zeker van dat je geen onvoorzichtigeden doet? Beloof me dat op je eerwoord'.

⁴ Letters from his parents to VH, NA, 291: '[...] om alle hygiënische voorzorgen te blijven volhouden - niet verslappen! Ik ben ook in voortdurende bezorgdheid over de weinige kleëren die je hebt meëgenomen'.

⁵ Letters from his parents to VH, NA, 291: geheel eenzaam op een afgelegen eiland'.

⁶ Letters from his parents to VH, NA, 291: 'Het is mij een heerlijke gedachte dat je zoo hartelijk aan je moeder gehecht zijt'.

⁷ Letters from his parents to VH, NA, 291: 'Wees niet te krenterig'.

⁸ Letters to VH from J(ames) Rorke Jr, from Carbonear, Newfoundland (16-1-1906); Charles Flensborg, from Tour-de-Peilz near Montreux (18-2-1906), 'Blackie', a student at Princeton (9-1906 en 27-12-1906); W. I. H. Hunter (1-5-1907); Basil im Thurn, from Torquay, without date, all NA, 297.

⁹ See below.

¹⁰ Letters from his parents to VH, NA, 291: 'Zal ik je nog herkennen met je lange baard?'

¹¹ Draak 1947, 74: 'hij [...] reeds toen een jongen [was] die niet ongaarne alleen was, zich bezighoudend met verschillende studieliefhebberijen. Aanvankelijk voelde hij zich getrokken tot de sterrenkunde, later tot talen. Ook had hij reeds zeer jong een grote en trouwe liefde voor de muziek; hij speelde viool en musiceerde geregeld'. She must have obtained this information from Van Hamel himself; she herself got to know him in the early 1930s.

¹² G. O. van 't Hooft to VH (13-7-1906), NA, 297, in which he thanks Van Hamel for the etching of Beethoven which he had sent him as an expression of gratitude for the lessons. Perhaps the same as the amateur photographer and visual artist G. O. van 't Hooft (1870-1947), who also lived on the Parkweg in Amsterdam.

¹³ See also the contribution by Nike Stam in this volume.



▲ Fig. 2. Postcard sent to Van Hamel by his father to the 'county school' in Wales, postmarked 19 August 1907. The Hague, Nationaal Archief, 2.21.081 (Archief van J.A. van Hamel), no. 291.

puutgezelschap ('Western Literary Student Association') of the UNICA student association.¹⁴ He also immerses himself in theatre and music, playing an outstanding 'Waiter' in the play 'You never can tell' by the Irish writer George Bernard Shaw.¹⁵ It was through the epic poems of Ossian, the romantic fabrications of the Scotsman James Macpherson (1736-1796), which were based on characters from the Irish Finn cycle, that Van Hamel soon developed an interest in Celtic.¹⁶ At the same time, he was introduced to Old Germanic studies by prof. Richard Constant Boer (1863-1929).¹⁷ As early as his second year as a student, Van Hamel writes to J. H. Staples to get information on 'the Gaelic and Keltic dialects'.¹⁸ In June 1906, he sends a letter to Adriaan Ernst Hugo Swaen (1863-1947), his former teacher at the Stedelijk Gymnasium in Amsterdam, regarding his trip to London. At that time, Swaen was lecturer in English at Groningen. In his reply to his *lievelingsleerling* ('favourite pupil'), Swaen gave the addresses of professors in London and Oxford whom Van Hamel might visit.¹⁹

In July 1907, Van Hamel goes on a field trip to Wales. At first he is accompanied by his parents, before he proceeds on his own to Rhyd Ddu, a hamlet in Snowdonia

southeast of Caernarfon. Here he took Welsh lessons with teacher and poet Henry Parry-Williams, who organised a 'county school' every year, and where several celticists had already studied Welsh, including Heinrich Zimmer (as early as 1899), Joseph Loth, Joseph Vendryes and Rudolf Thurneysen.²⁰ While there, Van Hamel obtained some books that remain part of his collection to this day.²¹

Van Hamel is impressed by Wales. He is editor of the Amsterdam student magazine *Propria cures* from December 1906 to April 1909, and this is where he publishes his first articles in 1907, starting with a three-part piece on 'Land en volk van Wales' ('Land and people of Wales').²² But it is Ireland that soon wins his favour, and his second publication in *Propria cures* is a translation of the story of Deirdre (*Longes mac nUislenn*, 'The exile of the sons of Uisliu') from the twelfth-century Book of Leinster into Dutch.²³ In February 1908, he contacts Richard Irvine Best (1872-1959) in Dublin, seeking to attend a summer course at the School of Irish Learning under Osborn Bergin.²⁴ He reports on his experiences in Ballyferriter (Co. Kerry) in *Propria cures*.²⁵ According to Draak, it was at this point that Van Hamel started to feel the urge to share his findings with those outside of the discipline, which was still largely unknown in the Netherlands.²⁶

Being a Germanist, Van Hamel's determination to learn both Welsh and Irish is remarkable, and in quick succession, while still only 21 or 22 years old, he establishes relations with the leading celticists of the day. In early July 1908, he meets Kuno Meyer, the leading and most productive German celticist of the time, in Dublin, although Meyer regrets not having been able to speak to him for longer.²⁷ Could Van Hamel not continue his studies over the winter, either in Dublin, or at Meyer's own university in Liverpool? More than anything, he counsels him to start studying the manuscripts as well, because Van Hamel would probably not have gotten around to that yet. 'A diligent Germanist, who is simultaneously at home in the field of Celtic, can work wonders'. He would have no trouble finding an area of study and would have a tremendous advantage over others. It does require a considerable amount of study and time, but Van Hamel should seize any such opportunity, which is unlikely to

¹⁴ Brief van het Dispuut aan ('letter of the student association to') VH (30-9-1904), NA, 296, to confirm his appointment, erroneously addressed to G. A. van Hamel Jr. Until he went to Bonn in 1914, Van Hamel would maintain his correspondence with members of UNICA on activities, often written in the student idiom of the time.

¹⁵ Draak 1947, 75.

¹⁶ Draak 1947, 71.

¹⁷ See the contribution by Alderik Blom in this volume.

¹⁸ J. H. Staples (Lissan, Co. Tyrone) to VH (18-9-1905). Staples authored three publications on Gaelic dialects in the *Transactions of the Philological Society* 22 (1891-1894) and 23 (1895-1898).

¹⁹ A. E. H. Swaen to VH (2-7-1906 and 31-1-1913), NA, 297. See also below.

²⁰ Parry 2001; Huws 2018. See also the contribution by Angharad Price in this volume.

²¹ Uit het Broek 2020.

²² Van Hamel 1907-1908a.

²³ Van Hamel 1907-1908b. This is almost a decade before A. Roland Holst published his Dutch adaptation as *Deirdre en de zonen van Usnach*, first in *De Gids* 80 (1916) 302-352, and as a standalone volume in 1920.

²⁴ See the contribution by Nike Stam in this volume.

²⁵ Van Hamel 1907-1908c. See also Ó Lúing 1991, 62-62. A notebook from Ballyferriter has survived, UBU, Archief Van Hamel, E 12, as well as a letter from Maurice Bowler in *Modern Irish* (11-1-1909), NA, 297. See also the contribution by Mícheál Ó Flaithearta in this volume.

²⁶ Draak 1947, 75.

²⁷ Ó Lúing 1991, 67.

present itself again soon.²⁸ This must have fuelled Van Hamel's ambitions, and he continues to work hard to master Old Irish. He writes a review of Holger Pedersen's *Vergleichende Grammatik der keltischen Sprachen* for the Dutch journal *Museum*.²⁹ The linguist Christianus Cornelius Uhlenbeck (1866-1951), a professor in Leiden, is not surprised to learn that Van Hamel is somewhat overtaxed at one point: in addition to preparing for the regular courses for his degree, he is simultaneously turning into a philologist and an expert in Celtic. Prof. Boer praises him highly.³⁰ When Van Hamel finishes his studies in Dutch in the summer of 1909, it seems certain that he looks forward to a fine scholarly career. This also emerges from Maartje Draak's character study of Van Hamel, in which she projects the traits of the man she met in the 1930s onto the past:

I can imagine and reconstruct Van Hamel the student from the teacher I knew: exceedingly intelligent, of high standing among his peers, but never polemical; possessing a disarming (self) irony; idealistic; friendly and attentive but not exuberant; in friendships most likely always the giving partner: both due to his greater richness of mind, and to an inner reserve, arising from a curious blend of modesty and pride. More cheerful and light-hearted than later on, when life had taught him strict composure, intermixed with no small measure of resignation.³¹

However, this masks the fact that on a personal level, Van Hamel had had an eventful time during his studies. It turned out that this promising scholar still had some dear lessons to learn on the interpersonal level.

Troubled relations

During his studies, Van Hamel met a girl with whom he would eventually establish a long-term relationship: Ina Elisa Willekes-McDonald (1886-1979), the eldest daughter of the lawyer François Willekes-McDonald (1859-1925). Ina grew up in a progressive liberal household. After graduating from the gymnasium in Haarlem in 1905, she went on to study law in Amsterdam. She had a great admiration for her professors Van Hamel – Anton Gerard's father – and Max Conrat (1848-1911).³² It is probably through this connection that Ina became acquainted with Anton Gerard himself. We have virtually no information about their relationship, other than the fact that Kees Boeke sent his congratulations to Van

van moesje heeft mij zeer
berispt in mijn vijandelijke
gevoelens.
Verheyl u verder in vrienden,
die uwe insultaties verdrijven,
of in vrienden, waarvoor je
hoor'n moeite moet doen om
vriendschap van hun teerlaufen,
dat van insultaties ruwerheid
alle sprake is!!
C.R. - die liebe
van u afwendt,
ware vriendschappen de waarheid
zoekende.

▲ Fig. 3. Letter from Cok Ritter to Van Hamel, 14 December 1906. The Hague, Nationaal Archief, 2.21.081 (Archief van J.A. van Hamel), no. 294.

Hamel in June 1906: 'In taking Ina, you take away one of my two friends, but what joy there is in my heart, that she has found happiness!'³³ This suggests an engagement. More is known about the somewhat stormy ending of their association, thanks to three letters sent to Van Hamel, who was about to turn 21, by Ina's father in June 1907. He notes that his first impression of Van Hamel had been accurate: 'a feeble handshake that fails to solicit any greater heartfelt solidity on the part of the

²⁸ K. Meyer to VH (15-7-1908), NA, 297; 'Ein tüchtiger Germanist, der zugleich auf dem celtischen Gebiete heimisch ist, kann Wunderdinge verrichten'.

²⁹ VH to R. I. Best (4-1-1909), NLI; Van Hamel 1909 and 1910b; this was followed by a review of Thurneysen's *Handbuch des Alt-Irischen* in 1910, Van Hamel 1910a and 1910c.

³⁰ C. C. Uhlenbeck to VH (26-3-1909), NA, 297.

³¹ Draak 1947, 75: 'Ik kan mij de student-Van Hamel voorstellen en herleiden uit de docent die ik gekend heb: zéér intelligent, gezag hebbend in zijn kring, echter nooit polemissch; van een ontwapenende (zelf) ironie; idealistisch; vriendelijk en belangstellend maar niet uitbundig; waarschijnlijk in vriendschappen steeds de gevende partij: zowel door zijn grotere rijkdom van gemoed, als door een innerlijke reserve, voortkomend uit een vreemde versmelting van bescheidenheid en trots. Vrolijker en luchthartiger was hij dan later, toen het leven hem een strenge beheersing had geleerd, met niet weinig resignatie ondermengd'.

³² For more on Ina's career, see Schreven 1987, and Hornstra 1973.

³³ Letter from K. Boeke (1884-1966, pedagogue) to VH (14-6-1906), NA, 297: 'Je neemt in Ina een van mijn twee vrienden weg, maar wat een blijdschap is er in mijn hart, dat zij het geluk gevonden heeft!'

³⁴ Letters from F. Willekes-McDonald to VH (23, 25 and 29 June 1907), NA, 297: 'een slappe handdruk die ook niet om meer innige stevigheid van de begroeter vraagt'.

greeter'.³⁴ Van Hamel's handshake is a recurring theme in the other letters, symbolising his lack of resolve in ending the relationship. François Willekes-McDonald does not accuse Van Hamel of having dishonourable intentions or of being calculating, and also forgives him for his delays, but does think that he used Ina to some extent to 'get through a year of tedious study'.³⁵ Van Hamel's feelings evidently went no deeper. Ina wanted to know where she stood, but Van Hamel kept her guessing. Fortunately, Van Hamel had eventually come clean, and thereby saved all parties from worse. Ina's father recognises that Van Hamel still needs to build his character, and concludes his last letter by stating: 'You will get on well, of that I have no doubt, but perhaps you will, at some point, want for something you could have had, and perhaps not, but for your own sake I hope that you will'.³⁶ And with that, he accurately predicted what Van Hamel would go on to experience and how this would shape his character.

The relationship between Ina Willekes-McDonald and Van Hamel, as well as the manner in which the latter handled things is not an isolated case. In Van Hamel's tumultuous friendship with Cornelis Wilhelmus 'Cok' Ritter (1885-1982), Van Hamel is similarly accused of a certain amount of selfishness. In December 1906, when they were both studying at the University of Amsterdam, and having made amends after a previous row years back, Ritter writes to Van Hamel about the latter's recruiting of a friend of Ritter's for a student association in which Van Hamel was active. Ritter feels taken advantage of and writes that he does not wish to be treated like a mere plaything. Van Hamel should not count on his friendship if he only seeks it for want of better options. The provocation may seem small, but it has been preceded by many grievances, and he has foolishly allowed himself to get drawn in by Van Hamel's *schoone phrasen* ('enticing phrases'). Ritter's anger leaps from the page.³⁷ In July 1907, Van Hamel successfully reconciles himself with Ritter, most likely not coincidentally very soon after he ended his relationship with Ina.³⁸

In both cases, Van Hamel is being accused of prioritising his own interests and being cavalier with the feelings

of his friends. He had yet to mature from a young man to an adult. Van Hamel perceived this as well, as can be seen from the 'Diary' he starts in the autumn of 1909.

Van Hamel's diary and poems

Van Hamel's 'Diary' commences in 1909 and continues until 1938, running up to page 134. Up to and including late 1912 (p. 33), albeit sometimes at long intervals, he records events or jots down his thoughts; the remainder is almost exclusively dedicated to poetry, in which Van Hamel managed to express what he failed to do in prose. Through his introductory remarks, we are directly introduced to Van Hamel as a young man – he is 23 years old at the time – and his self-appraisal. He begins his Diary by explaining what he sets out to do: to write down his thoughts and feelings so that he can later assess his personal growth. Previously, in his romantic phase, he wrote poems that reflected his feelings, but he is more 'verstandelijk' ('sensible') these days, putting his thoughts to paper more directly. And he stresses:

Consequently, this book encloses the most intimate [thoughts] I have and may never be seen by anyone else. At present, my greatest fear is that, if I ever think of getting married, I shall have my wife read it and its charm will be lost. [...] A diary [...] is very useful for preserving the broad outline of our character [...] It is certainly very eccentric of me to start such a thing. I will either be someone who – in human terms – is worth having around, or a blabbermouth. In any case, I will try to be very sincere: I am not producing a piece of literature.³⁹

It could be argued that romance and reason always vied for supremacy in both Van Hamel's personal and academic life.⁴⁰ In his Diary, romance triumphs: he soon reverts to poetry in order to express his feelings. His fear of a future wife knowing his private thoughts is telling, and Van Hamel seems to have struggled to enter into long-term relationships with others, in another conflict of romance and reason: 'The more I get to know people, the better I can appreciate most of them, but the less I can stand them: to the mind, their good qualities become more apparent, to the heart, their unpleasant aspects become more bothersome'.⁴¹ He extends this

³⁵ Letters from F. Willekes-McDonald to VH (23, 25 and 29 June 1907), NA, 297: 'door een jaar van saaie studie heen te komen'.

³⁶ Letters from F. Willekes-McDonald to VH (23, 25 and 29 June 1907), NA, 297: 'Je zult je weg verder wel goed maken, daar twijfel ik niet aan, misschien zal je eens iets ontberen wat je had kunnen hebben, misschien ook niet, maar voor jouzelf blijf ik dit hopen'. Ina obtained her doctorate in 1911, and married Adriaan Pieter (Apie) Prins shortly afterwards. She became best known as Ina Prins as a translator, feminist and proponent of communism.

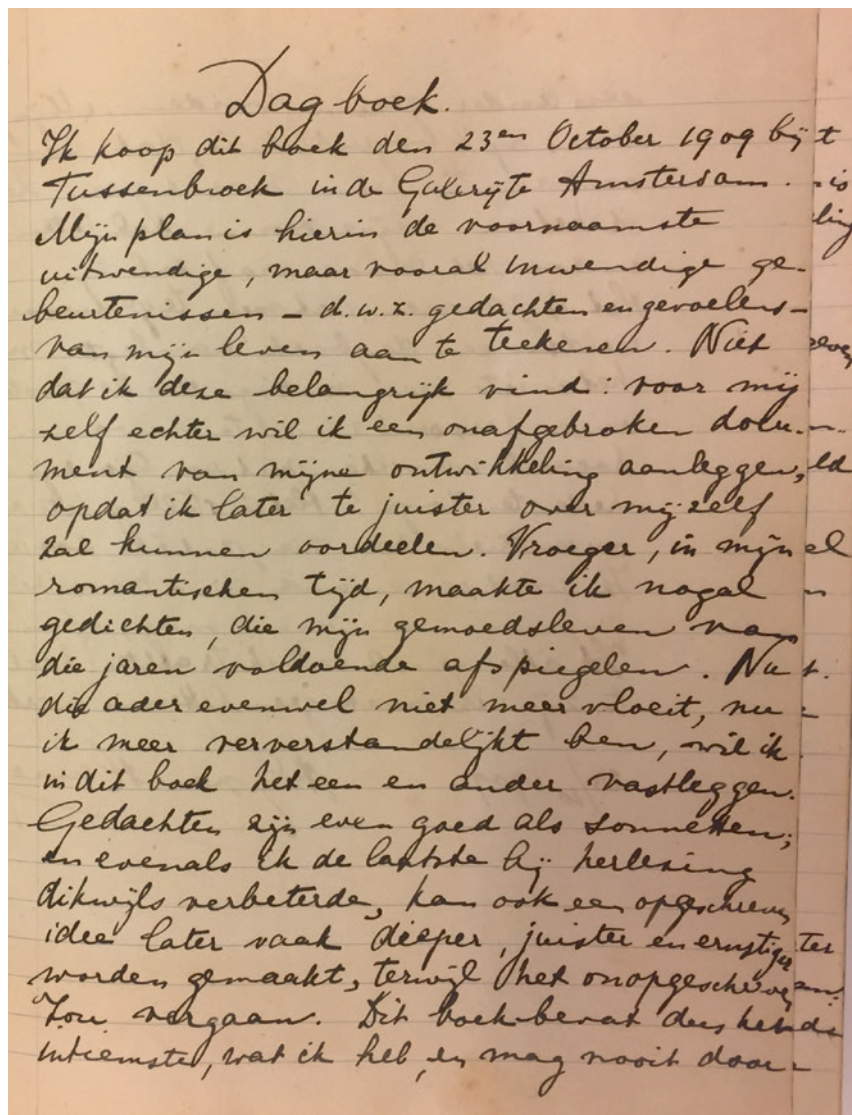
³⁷ Letters from C. W. Ritter to VH (5-7-1906, 13-12-1906 (though it says 1901) and 14-12-1906), NA, 294. See also the letter from Gerard Jacob van Brakel (1885-1960, judge) to VH (dated: Wednesday evening), NA, 297, in which Van Brakel refers to the latter's severed friendship with Ritter.

³⁸ Letters from C. W. Ritter to VH (9-7-1907, 5-8-1907 and 16-11-1910), NA, 294. Cok Ritter was the son of Pierre Henri Ritter Sr. (1851-1912), professor of literature and philosophy at Utrecht University, and the younger brother of Pierre Henri Ritter Jr. (1882-1962), the most influential literary critic in the Netherlands in the decades surrounding the Second World War. Cok Ritter went on to become cashier-general of De Nederlandsche Bank (the Dutch Central Bank) and helped Walraven van Hall (1906-1945) become 'banker of the resistance' by committing treasury fraud.

³⁹ Diary, pp. 1-2, NA, 298: 'Dit boek bevat dus het intiemste, wat ik heb, en mag nooit door een ander gezien worden. Mijn grootste vrees op 't oogenblik is, dat, wanneer ik ooit aan trouwen mocht gaan denken, ik het aan mijne vrouw zal laten lezen en zoo het mooie er af zal zijn. [...] Een dagboek [...] is iets zeer nuttigs om de groote lijn in onze persoonlijkheid te bewaren [...] Het is stellig iets zeer excentrieks van me, dat ik zoo iets begin. Ik word of iemand, die – menscherlijkerwijs gesproken – er wezen mag, of een kletskaus. In alle geval wil ik trachten heel oprecht te zijn: ik maak geen litterair werk'.

⁴⁰ See also Draak 1947, 71-72.

⁴¹ Diary, pp. 3-4 (26-10-1909), NA, 298: 'Naar mate ik de menschen meer leer kennen, kan ik de meesten van hen beter waardeeren, doch minder goed uitstaan: voor het verstand worden hunner goede eigenschappen steeds duidelijker, voor het gevoel worden hunne onaangename zijden steeds hinderlijker'.



◀ Fig. 4. The first page of Van Hamel's 'Diary', 23 October 1909. The Hague, Nationaal Archief, 2.21.081 (Archief van J.A. van Hamel), no. 298.

to intimacy, of which he says there are two kinds: an intimate, sticky sort of intimacy that imposes all kinds of mutual obligations, and an unconscious intimacy in which people simply tend to be obliging to one another. 'I used to like the former, now it disgusts me'.⁴² This is not to say that he rejects intimacy outright, but rather that the obligations involved in a relationship bother him:

Nothing beats tender love, merging one's entire being with another soul, for the sole purpose of being close to someone. This produces a communion that evokes a transcendent bliss. When one knows this feeling, how easy it is to understand Tristan und Isolde! But it is more fortunate to have this

love for someone of one's own sex: otherwise it will lead to marriage and marriage should be based on other premises.⁴³

That he seeks the love or affection of his own sex is already apparent at the beginning of the Diary, and it would appear that he suffered from the same experience as he had had with Ina Willekes-McDonald:

The most unpleasant relationship is surely when you feel that someone cares more about you than you do about him, that he even loves or admires you to some extent. Such is the case with Mr W. D. de Jonge and me: now I can never live in The Hague again.⁴⁴

⁴² Diary, p. 5 (2-11-1909), NA, 298: 'Vroeger hield ik wel van de eerste, nu walg ik ervan'. As an example of the former, he mentions his association with Flipje [Philip Gerard] Gunning (1886-1972, studied classical literature in Amsterdam), of the latter [Cok] Ritter (see above) and [Willem] Van Maanen (1890-1989, studied English in Amsterdam).

⁴³ Diary, p. 6 (22-11-1909), NA, 298: 'Niets gaat boven warm liefhebben, met het geheele wezen opgaan in een andere ziel, naar iemand met het eenige doel hem bij zich te hebben. Dat geeft een gemeenschap, die bovenmenselijke zaligheden doet vermoeden. Wanneer men dat gevoel kent, hoe begrijpelijk wordt dan Tristan und Isolde! Maar het is gelukkiger deze liefde te hebben voor iemand van de eigen sexe: anders toch loopt ze op een huwelijk uit en voor een huwelijk zijn andere grondslagen gewenscht'.

⁴⁴ Diary, NA, 298: 'De onaangenaamste verhouding is wel die, dat je voelt, dat iemand meer om jou geeft dan jij om hem, dat hij je zelfs eenigzins liefheeft of bewondert. Zoo is 't tusschen Jhr. Mr. W. D. de Jonge en mij: nu kan ik ook nooit meer in Den Haag wonen'.

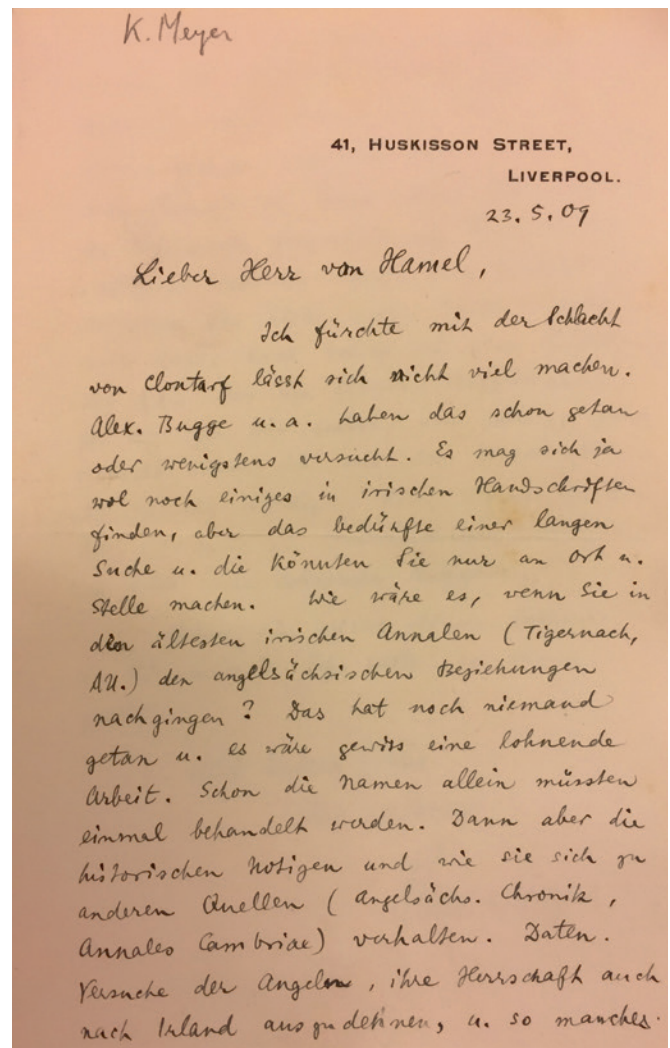
The man in question was Willem Dignus de Jonge (1883-1942), who studied political science in Leiden and was living in The Hague by 1909.⁴⁵ The nature of their relationship is unclear, and Van Hamel does not rule out a relationship with a woman as yet. In early January 1911, 'heated by wine and music making', he returns to his home one evening and finds that a letter from Ina has arrived. He was badly shaken, and had already decided to return to her if she were to ask: she was his one love, and he was convinced that marriage would make them both happy. But she only asked for her old notebooks, because they held memories of her recently deceased brother Frans. Van Hamel, however, had already burned them in order to break free from his past. He very nearly declared his readiness to continue their relationship by means of a Latin poem, but what if she would have accepted? 'Then I would have been stuck'.⁴⁶ He concludes:

I do plan to get married in the long run, but I feel I am not up for it yet: I am as yet incomplete. Only when I am ready will I look for someone with whom I will await my death. At the moment, I would not know of anyone but Ina: however, that can never be.⁴⁷

And over the past number of years, it must have also become apparent to him, that he preferred to seek friendship and affection from other men rather than women.

Towards a doctorate

Having completed his degree in Dutch, Van Hamel sets his sights on a doctorate – without which he would not be able to pursue a serious academic career. He would like to work on a subject which straddles both Celtic and Germanic studies, but has some difficulty coming up with a fitting topic. Even before finishing his Dutch studies, he begins asking around for ideas. In April or May 1909, he sends a letter to Alexander Bugge (1870-1929), the Norwegian professor of history at Kristiania, who had travelled to Ireland to learn the local language.⁴⁸ Van Hamel proposes to visit him in May, but Bugge advises against it: because of exams, no lectures will be held from then until mid-June, and the library has little in the way of Celtic material. But since Van Hamel has not yet arrived at a topic for his dissertation, Bugge suggests comparing (Nordic) skaldic and Irish poetry, or the Irish influence on Nordic sagas; both of which were yet to be seriously investigated. He is, of course, welcome to visit, but September would be a better month.⁴⁹



▲ Fig. 5. Letter from Kuno Meyer to Van Hamel, 23 May 1909, in which Meyer proposes a topic for his dissertation to Van Hamel. The Hague, Nationaal Archief, 2.21.081 (Archief van J.A. van Hamel), no. 297.

Van Hamel then turns to Meyer with a proposal to study some aspect of the traditions relating to the battle of Clontarf (north of Dublin), where Irishmen and Vikings fought each other and the mighty Irish king Brian Boróime was killed in 1014. Perhaps this idea had also been suggested to him by Bugge. However, in a letter dated 23 May 1909, Meyer rejects this proposal: Bugge has already done some work on this, and it would necessitate extended, on-site source studies.⁵⁰ But perhaps

⁴⁵ 'Van de Afdelingen', *Neerlandia* 13 (1909) 73, where Jhr. Mr. W. D. de Jonge was elected as a member of the board for The Hague, and it is stated that he delivered a lecture entitled: *Steunt eigen nijverheid* ('support local manufacturing').

⁴⁶ Diary, NA, 298: 'Dan zou ik vast gezeten hebben'.

⁴⁷ Diary, pp. 11-12 (15-1-1911), NA, 298: 'Ik wil wel trouwen op den duur, maar ik voel, dat ik er nog niet aan toe ben: ik ben nog niet af. Eerst als ik zoover ben zal ik iemand zoeken, met wie ik mijn dood zal afwachten. Op 't oogenblik zou ik geen ander weten dan Ina: dat zal echter nooit meer gaan'.

⁴⁸ He is best known among celticists as the editor and translator of *Caithréim Chellacháin Chaisil* ('The military career of Cellachán of Cashel'), published in Kristiania in 1905.

⁴⁹ Letter from A. Bugge to VH (5-11-1909), NA, 297.

⁵⁰ Van Hamel did not abandon this idea, however, and in 1939 his student Albertus Johannes Goedheer obtained his doctorate with a dissertation entitled: *Irish and Norse traditions about the battle of Clontarf*.

Van Hamel could look into the earliest Irish annals and examine the earliest interactions between the Irish and the Anglo-Saxons? No one has done any work on this so far and it would be a rewarding study. He could investigate names, chronology and events, and Meyer could help him obtain source material and assist him with any difficulties.⁵¹

Van Hamel agrees and gets to work on this, but also stays in touch with Bugge. In late July, he leaves for Norway. He visits the west coast near Bergen, reaches Kristiania by early August, meets up with his parents in Stockholm and also visits Uppsala and Visby.⁵² This trip marks the end of a comparatively untroubled time in his life, for following this he leaves his family home, at the age of 24, in order to teach Dutch at the Stedelijk Gymnasium Middelburg. All of a sudden, he has to make ends meet and he finds his salary to be insufficient. Although he does enjoy the teaching itself, the position offers few enticing prospects for someone of his ambitions.⁵³ He feels lonely and miserable,⁵⁴ and only his studies seem to give him any real sense of gratification.⁵⁵ He manages to keep up his doctoral studies alongside working his job and maintaining his household. In December 1910, Boer reads the first draft of his dissertation and on the whole is well pleased with it.⁵⁶

In April 1911, Van Hamel is in love with a girl – for the last time, as far as can be ascertained. His youthful idealism astounds him, and the fact that she has no money is of no consequence to him. But within less than three weeks, he breaks off their fledgling relationship: it was but a crush, there was no deeper connection; moreover, as a teacher, he could not afford to get married; it would have meant foregoing his usual comforts. Over Easter on the Isle of Wight, he discussed the matter with his mother. Their conclusion was: 'If I marry while I am poor, I will drive myself into the ground'.⁵⁷

In the struggle between romance and reason, the latter wins this battle. His fear of commitment is too strong, his financial situation too dire, and his penchant for luxury too great. On 2 June 1911, he is awarded his doctorate in Dutch literature for his dissertation on *De oudste Keltische en Angelsaksische geschiedbronnen*

(‘The oldest Celtic and Anglo-Saxon historical sources’).⁵⁸ In addition to his supervisor Boer and several Dutch professors, he also thanks Bergin, Meyer, Best and Parry-Williams. Van Hamel’s research may rightly be considered groundbreaking, and he initiated a debate that continues to this day, especially when it comes to the interrelation between the various Irish annals, their relationship with the works of the Anglo-Saxon scholar Bede (672/3-735), and the position of the *Historia Brittonum* and its Irish version *Lebor Bretnach* in medieval Irish historiography. Van Hamel compared the various historical records up to the year 1066 (when William of Normandy conquered England), and concluded that the main Irish annals had been compiled from the same sources until about 1040, and that Anglo-Saxon sources had also been added to the common text around that time.⁵⁹ Although this hypothesis no longer holds up today, as a maiden study, conducted with a thorough knowledge of the Celtic and Germanic languages and sources involved, it certainly merited the *cum laude* it was awarded with.⁶⁰ Towards the end of his dissertation, Van Hamel presents 31 theses that further showcase his knowledge of Old Irish, Welsh, Old Germanic, Old Norse and Middle Dutch. As Meyer had foreseen, this placed him in a unique position. The downside was that his dissertation was written in Dutch, and consequently did not gain much international attention,⁶¹ while the topic was quite extraordinary in Dutch academia for a degree in Dutch. Van Hamel had proven his qualities, but the question remained how he could profit by them, both in a literal and a figurative sense.

A bid for the chair of English

The first opportunity to advance his career arrives when the University of Amsterdam announces its intention to establish a chair of English language and literature in 1911.⁶² Van Hamel decides to apply, but has not yet published a single article in this field of studies. His archives contain a dozen notebooks dealing with a subject Van Hamel now considers publishing on in the near future: the English essayists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁶³ But in January 1912, he instead asks Best if he knows of any publications on ‘Anglo-Irish’, because he would like to shed some light on that feature for scholars on the continent, especially in relation to

⁵¹ Letter from K. Meyer to VH (23-5-1909), NA, 297.

⁵² Diary, pp. 9-11, NA, 298. He composed sonnets in this period, ‘bedoeld als voorrede tot eene reeks gedichten, waarin de waarde van het individu verheerlijkt zou worden – maar daar is nooit iets van gekomen’ (‘intended as a preface to a series of poems, in which an individual’s worth would be glorified – but nothing ever came of it’).

⁵³ Draak 1947, 75.

⁵⁴ Diary, p. 22 (21-5-1911), NA, 298, a short poem beginning ‘Een dag kan hier zoo eenzaam zijn / En al de menschen onverschillig’ (‘A day can be so lonely here / And all people uncaring’), in which he also laments missing his mother and home.

⁵⁵ Diary, pp. 23-24 (19-6-1911), NA, 298, the poem ‘Het bewuste leven’ (‘Conscious life’).

⁵⁶ R. C. Boer to VH (11-12-1910), NA, 295.

⁵⁷ Diary, pp. 17-19 (8 and 28-4-1911), NA, 298: ‘Als ik in arme omstandigheden trouw, help ik mijzelf naar den grond’. He goes on to quote George Bernard Shaw’s play *Getting married* (1908).

⁵⁸ Van Hamel 1911b (196 pp.). See also the notes in UBU, Archief Van Hamel, A 11 and A 12.

⁵⁹ Van Hamel 1911b, p. 118 and thesis III.

⁶⁰ On these matters, see Mc Carthy 2008; Evans 2010; Mc Carthy 2018.

⁶¹ Reviews appeared in French (Vendryes 1911, more of a summary) and German (Deutschbein 1913).

⁶² As of November 1904, the subject had been covered by a *privaatdocent* (‘independent lecturer’), Willem van der Graaf.

⁶³ UBU, Archief Van Hamel, B 2, 3, 11, 12, C 1, 2, 5, 7, 8, 9, 14. In his Diary, p. 27 (27-2-1912), NA, 298, he quotes one of these essayists, Sir William Temple (see also B 12).

the poet William B. Yeats.⁶⁴ He writes an article on the subject at breakneck speed and in the meantime muses about his future in his Diary.

Van Hamel does not wish to become a professor solely for financial reasons. He considers himself to be too cheerful, too worldly and too superficial; 'scholarly friction is lacking, and conviviality abounds'.⁶⁵ He asks: 'Am I the same person as the lonely and timid one I was before? [...] In spite of everything, I have become a man, and a refined man at that. And though I may partake in outward life more than I used to, this does not take away my firm conviction that all of it remains perfectly indifferent to me'.⁶⁶ He feels fondness only for his family home and for academia. 'Meanwhile the prospect of becoming a professor before long is no mean thing. For having regular encounters with scholars must be something extraordinary'.⁶⁷ Being a teacher cannot offer that to him: 'Tedium and superficial drivel are a curse from which no one can escape in the end, myself included. May I get out of it in time!'⁶⁸ He concludes:

There is one more thing about which I feel conflicted: should I, if I were to be appointed as professor, not get married before I leave Middelburg? The opportunity is unique and may never arise again. And yet I wonder whether, with a view to my mother's future, I should not rather refrain. But it is something to think about. However, no marriage, without deep and considered (i.e. sensible and felt) affection.⁶⁹

In April 1912, he visits Paris, which he finds somewhat disappointing; London, for him, evokes more of history in its various stages. He is much more excited about Venice, and he considers the visit to have been one of the great privileges of his life; 'there one is still at liberty to feel what it means to excel'.⁷⁰ He includes two poems on Venice to his Diary.⁷¹ When he returns from his holidays, he learns that his article has appeared

in print: in September 1912, 'On Anglo-Irish syntax' is published in the German journal *Englische Studien*.⁷²

Van Hamel is one of the first to publish on the subject, and he makes good use of his knowledge of Modern Irish to explain certain constructions.⁷³ He is also the first Dutchman to publish on Yeats.⁷⁴ But whatever euphoria he may have felt on seeing his first international publication appear in print is soon overturned. On 14 October, he writes: 'As for the English professorship, I almost despair'.⁷⁵ Perhaps it dawned on him that his article would not have the impact he had initially hoped for, and perhaps he had already been informed by Swaen that Johan Frederik Bense (1867-1942), an English teacher at the HBS (*Hogereburgerschool*, 'higher civic school') in Arnhem, was preparing a critique on it.⁷⁶ Bense did so by means of an 'open letter', i.e. a letter addressed to an individual but made public in print, which may have been sent off to several different universities in this case.⁷⁷ In four pages, Van Hamel's article is ripped apart, as Bense points out series of errors in its English, lines of argument, assumptions, limitations and conclusions. Bense writes that he had heard that Van Hamel had already applied himself to Celtic during his studies in Amsterdam, and that it takes 'in-depth study and meticulous research' to master such a discipline.⁷⁸ All the stranger that Van Hamel is now venturing down a different path, without undertaking the requisite studies. Moreover, he publishes his article in a journal that will hardly be read by either English or Irish linguists, while the usual readers of *Englische Studien* will not be interested in Anglo-Irish. Furthermore, anyone wishing to publish on that subject should have a thorough command not just of Irish but also of English. And Van Hamel repeatedly demonstrates that he still falls short in that respect. Van Hamel's line 'Everybody attempting to speak a language he doesn't know thoroughly, will forge strange things' is ruthlessly echoed by Bense: 'If I were to quote all the strange things that you have forged,

⁶⁴ VH to R. I. Best (5-1-1912), NLI.

⁶⁵ Diary, NA, 298: 'wetenschappelijke wrijving ontbreekt, en gezelligheid is er te over'.

⁶⁶ Diary, NA, 298: 'Ben ik dezelfde als de eenzame en bedeesde van vroeger? [...] Ondanks alles ben ik mensch geworden, en een verfijnd mensch. En al neem ik meer dan voorheen deel aan het uiterlijk leven, dat neemt niet de stellige overtuiging weg, dat het mij volmaakt onverschillig blijft'.

⁶⁷ Diary, NA, 298: 'Het vooruitzicht eerlang professor te worden is intusschen niet iets gerings. Want de geregelde omgang met wetenschappelijke menschen moet iets buitengewoons zijn'.

⁶⁸ Diary, NA, 298: 'Sleure en oppervlakkig gebazel zijn een vloek, waaraan op den duur niemand ontkomt, ook ik niet. Moge ik er tijdig uit komen!'

⁶⁹ Diary, pp. 25-26 (18-2-1912), NA, 298: 'Dan is er nog één ding, waar ik over aarzel: zou ik, mocht ik tot professor benoemd worden, maar niet trouwen, vóórdat ik Middelburg verlaat? De gelegenheid is éénig en doet zich allicht nooit meer voor. Ik weet alleen niet, of ik het met 't oog op mama's toekomst maar niet laten moet. Het is echter iets om over te denken. Edoch geen huwelijk, zonder diepe en bezonken (d.w.z. verstandige en gevoelde) genegenheid'. Compare also quotes from the Irish author George Moore (1852-1933): 'The man of whom I am dreaming, shy, unobtrusive and lonely, whose interests are literary, and whose life is not troubled by women [...]'; 'There is a dear privacy in the morning hours of single life'; Diary, p. 31 (1-6-1912) and p. 35 (7-3-1913), NA, 298.

⁷⁰ Diary, NA, 298: 'dàár staat het nog vrij, te voelen wat uitmunten is'.

⁷¹ Diary, pp. 28-30, NA, 298.

⁷² Van Hamel 1912a.

⁷³ His work is still used today, see, for example, Filppula 1999, 13, 22, 25, 34, 197, 218.

⁷⁴ Supheert 1995, 73.

⁷⁵ Diary, p. 31, NA, 298: 'Aan het Engelsche professoraat wanhoop ik vrij wel'.

⁷⁶ Bense obtained his doctorate in 1924 at an advanced age in Amsterdam for his dissertation *Anglo-Dutch relations from the earliest times to the death of William the Third, being an historical introduction to a dictionary of the Low-Dutch element in the English vocabulary* (commercial edition: Oxford, 1925). In it, he mentions his friend Swaen on p. xii.

⁷⁷ J. F. Bense, *Open brief aan dr. A. G. van Hamel, te Middelburg* (Arnhem, 23-10-1912). I am indebted to Kees Veelenturf for providing me with a pdf of this document, bearing the stamp of the Leiden University Library.

⁷⁸ J. F. Bense, *Open brief aan dr. A. G. van Hamel, te Middelburg* (Arnhem, 23-10-1912): 'diepgaande studie en nauwgezet onderzoek'.

I could copy just about everything you yourself say in your article'.⁷⁹ More damning still is Bense's conclusion that it is a good thing that Van Hamel is a teacher of Dutch, and not of English, because he brings the Dutch reputation for being proficient in foreign languages into disrepute, and that this is all the more regrettable because another Van Hamel has always upheld the good name of the Dutch in this respect.

The latter must have been particularly galling for Van Hamel, for we may assume that his uncle and namesake Antonius Gerardus' academic career had served to inspire him.⁸⁰ And now Van Hamel's very name had become subjected to a critique that was equal in both its viciousness and its impact to what has become commonplace in contemporary social media and 'cancel culture'. Bense could, of course, have opted for a less public and heavy-handed approach, however valid his criticisms may be on most points. It is not known whether he held some personal grudge against Van Hamel, or whether he was simply deeply disturbed by Van Hamel's brazenly opportunistic publication aimed at securing a professorship – although Bense does not mention this broader connection. Either way, Van Hamel's campaign had been rendered hopeless. By late November, this was confirmed, but Van Hamel had already resigned himself to it by then, and took the news for granted. Then reality sets in:

I ought to be deeply ashamed that I did not understand beforehand how ill-advised the English professorship in Amsterdam was for me. Was this what I dedicated myself to a considered, conscious and reasonable life for?⁸¹

This view is shared by others. The new professor of English, appointed in January 1913, is to be Swaen himself, Van Hamel's former teacher at the gymnasium in Amsterdam. Van Hamel congratulates him, and Swaen replies that he is glad that the issue has not led to a separation between the two of them. He goes on to offer him some words of comfort:

You are so well regarded that you will certainly become a professor at a younger age than me, such is the general opinion in academia. And you can take my word for it, Van Hamel, as an elder: once you are appointed as a professor in your own discipline – be it Dutch or Celtic – you will derive far more satisfaction

and fulfilment from it than if you had had to teach a discipline that was never really the one you would have chosen.⁸²

Swaen was right. Van Hamel got over this setback and set his sights even more unreservedly on Celtic.

A contest over *Lebor gabála*

Van Hamel left Middelburg in April 1913, and moved to Nieuwehaven 93 in Rotterdam in September 1913, where he started teaching Dutch at the Erasmiaans Gymnasium.⁸³ He had already decided in the autumn of 1912 to go abroad to study Celtic at the end of the school term.⁸⁴ It is likely that he then approached Meyer to see if he could join him in Berlin. And with this, Van Hamel was drawn into a scholarly dispute that gave him, perhaps for the first time, a sense of the fierce rivalries that have plagued the discipline all too often.

The origins of the dispute date back to 1908, when R. A. S. Macalister (1870-1950), an archaeologist by training, submitted his edition of the O'Clery recension of *Lebor gabála* to the Irish Texts Society. This edition was based on a copy of the text by the Irish Franciscan monk Michael O'Clery (Mícheál Ó Cléirigh) dating from the first half of the seventeenth century. *Lebor gabála* ('Book of invasions') is the medieval Irish pseudo-historical reconstruction of the settling of Ireland from the dawn of time. The Irish Texts Society approached Meyer, among others, to appraise Macalister's work, but Meyer bluntly told them they need not bother: Macalister was simply too incompetent to produce a proper edition.⁸⁵ Macalister subsequently withdrew his edition, planning to publish it elsewhere.

It so happened that Meyer had bought a manuscript containing the O'Clery recension in 1907, which was actually an autograph copy produced by Michael O'Clery himself. This may have been a contributing factor to his dismissive attitude. He may, in fact, have been planning to produce an edition himself, but seems to have abandoned the idea until Van Hamel presented himself. He sent Van Hamel the seventeenth-century manuscript by mail (probably in late 1912) so that the latter could get started on it. But in January 1913, the Irish scholar and politician Eoin MacNeill (1867-1945) announced his intention to help Macalister get his edition back on track.⁸⁶ MacNeill also set out his view on the history of

⁷⁹ J. F. Bense, *Open brief aan dr. A. G. van Hamel, te Middelburg* (Arnhem, 23-10-1912): 'Indien ik alle *strange things* wilde aanhalen, die U heeft *forged*, dan zou ik zoowat alles wat U *zelf* zegt in Uw artikel kunnen overschrijven'.

⁸⁰ According to Draak 1947, 74, this might be overstating things, for she wrote: 'Dat de neef evenwel speciaal de invloed van zijn oom zou hebben ondervonden – verder dan de algemene sfeer van het culturele milieu waarin hij opgroeide – bleek mij niet' ('That the nephew would have been especially influenced by his uncle – beyond the general ambience of the cultural milieu in which he grew up – was not apparent to me').

⁸¹ Diary, p. 31 (9 and 19-12-1912), NA, 298: 'Ik mag mij wel diep schamen, dat ik niet vooruit begrepen heb, hoe weinig wenschelijk voor mij het Engelsche professoraat te Amsterdam was. Heb ik mij daarvoor op een weloverwogen, bewust en redelijk leven toegelegd?'

⁸² A. E. H. Swaen to VH (31-1-1913), NA, 297. Swaen was also closely associated with the journal *Neophilologus*, founded in 1916, in which Van Hamel would publish regularly from 1919 onwards as well, and of which he would be an editor from 1925 until his death in 1945; cf. A. E. H. Swaen to VH (2-9-1906), NA, 297.

⁸³ The decision had been reached sometime previously, Diary, p. 31 (14-10-1912), NA, 298; see also VH to R. I. Best (7-3-1913), NLI.

⁸⁴ Diary, p. 31 (14-10-1912), NA, 298; Ó Lúing 1991, 124.

⁸⁵ Flahive 2009, 83, in which he cites records from the archives of the Irish Text Society.

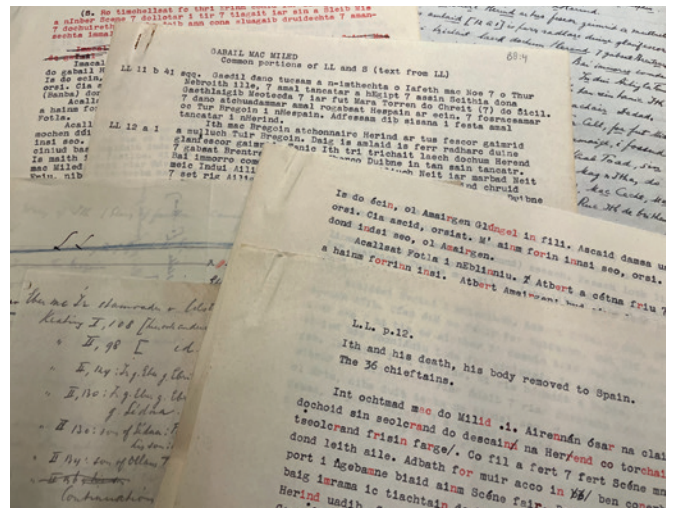
⁸⁶ Flahive 2009, 84-85. MacNeill probably sent his letter on 26 January 1913 (see below), and not in February as per Flahive.

Lebor gabála, which Van Hamel would later copy out for private use.⁸⁷ But given that Macalister had also worked on other aspects of *Lebor gabála*, Meyer failed to realise that Macalister and MacNeill were producing an edition of the O'Clery recension.

Van Hamel remained equally unaware. In March 1913, he writes a letter to Best stating that he has begun working on an edition of Meyer's manuscript. Best informs MacNeill, who deplores this 'grotesque' state of affairs, the more so because seventeenth-century manuscripts are now being considered ahead of those dating back to the twelfth century. Macalister also steps up his game and aims to finish their edition by June in order to beat Van Hamel to it.⁸⁸ Meyer, meanwhile, tries to convince MacNeill not to help Macalister. But he also agrees to inform Van Hamel, who will visit Berlin in May. Macalister then offers to work together with Van Hamel in a year and a half, if Van Hamel should be available. Van Hamel, somewhat dispirited by this turn of events but also recognising the enormity of the work involved in publishing an edition, declines. He courteously agrees to stand aside and give Macalister free rein. He decides to focus on the evolution of *Lebor gabála* instead, a topic that he had already intended to address in his edition.⁸⁹

He sets out for Dublin via London in late July, where he will consult manuscripts at the Royal Irish Academy. He stays with Best and also meets MacNeill.⁹⁰ Van Hamel's preliminary studies can be found spread across over a dozen notebooks, with some parts written by Meyer, no doubt during Van Hamel's time in Berlin.⁹¹ In November 1913, Van Hamel is just about finished and Best offers to read his article to see if it might be published in *Ériu*. In January 1914, after Van Hamel has taken a brief holiday in Switzerland, he sends his proofs to Best. These were the proofs of Van Hamel's article 'On *Lebor gabála*', which would eventually be published in *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 10 (1915) 97-197.⁹² It is one of the longest single-part articles ever published in this journal, which was then edited by the indefatigable Meyer.

The historical evolution of *Lebor gabála* in all its dynamics, various adaptations and related matter is complex, but of great importance for the development of medieval Irish literature and (pseudo-)history because of the vast impact of this text. Van Hamel's study was already



▲ Fig. 6. Some of Van Hamel's notes on *Lebor gabála*, Utrecht, University Library, Archief Van Hamel, B 8.

underway when Thurneysen presented his views on the interrelatedness and development of the manuscripts of *Lebor gabála* in 1913.⁹³ Accordingly, Van Hamel begins his much more comprehensive study with a critique of Thurneysen. As early as the proofs he sent to Best, Van Hamel admits that the latter was right to say that Van Hamel had treated the great scholar somewhat irreverently. However, Van Hamel was either unable or unwilling to amend his text. Reading it now, one may be left with the impression that Van Hamel intended to make his mark in his first major international publication in Celtic studies by criticising a well-respected scholar. However, this brazen attempt at proving himself earned him a rebuke from Thurneysen, although the latter was enough of a gentleman to forward a copy of the proofs to Van Hamel in late 1914. Van Hamel had, in a sense, overplayed his hand. He writes to Best that Thurneysen is right to say that he had not treated him fairly, but then tries to save face by arguing that Thurneysen was otherwise pursuing petty issues and cannot deny that he had failed to study the manuscripts sufficiently.⁹⁴ In doing so, he dismisses Thurneysen's criticism a little too lightly. The German scholar pointedly notes that although his 1913 article ran to but eight pages, Van Hamel appears to have read it only in passing, while repeatedly criticising it. Thurneysen demonstrates that this had clearly been unjustified in some respects, and

⁸⁷ UBU, Archief Van Hamel, A 26 add. 6; see Jaski 2009, 48-49, in which the letter is quoted.

⁸⁸ Flahive 2009, 86 ('to choke him off if possible', meaning Van Hamel).

⁸⁹ See also the contribution by Ranke de Vries in this volume.

⁹⁰ Flahive 2009, 89-90, where Van Hamel's letter to R. I. Best dated 10-6-1913 is quoted at p. 89.

⁹¹ UBU, Archief Van Hamel, A 16, A 6, A 21 and A 25 ('important details I-IV'), A 14 ('opzet editie' ('draft edition')), A 15 and A 9 ('Inhoud der versies van LG onderling vergeleken I-II' ('Contents of the versions of LG compared among themselves I-II')), A 18 I-III ('Poems'), A 7 ('Boek van Leinster' ('Book of Leinster')), A 19 and A 28 ('Book of Lecan'), A 26 ('Lebor Gabala, Glinne Da Locha'), and loose notes in B 8. A 18, 26 and 28 (as well as some other notebooks) contain notes by Meyer. See also Van Zanten and Jaski 2008.

⁹² VH to R. I. Best (14-1-1914), NLI; Van Hamel 1915b. The first and only volume of the O'Clery edition (Macalister and MacNeill 1916) was universally condemned by reviewers. It is unclear to what extent MacNeill ultimately contributed to this volume, see Flahive 2009, 90-92. Macalister's five-volume edition of *Lebor gabála*, published by the Irish Texts Society, also attracted a great deal of criticism, but nevertheless remains the standard edition. See, among others, Carey 1993.

⁹³ Thurneysen 1913.

⁹⁴ VH to R. I. Best (8-12-1914), NLI: 'for the rest he is hunting trifles'.

also casts doubt on a number of other assertions made by Van Hamel. But he also admits that he had been wrong on some points, and recognises that Van Hamel's study has yielded valuable results.⁹⁵

Van Hamel had crossed swords with Thurneysen, had shown bravado, but had not come out of it entirely unscathed. In the end, he could feel satisfied, having made what may be considered the most significant contribution of any Dutchman to modern Celtic studies up until then. And he did not leave it at that, for that same year he published an article in *Revue celtique* on entries from outside of Ireland in the Irish *Fragmentary Annals* – a subject related to the topic of his dissertation.⁹⁶ One year later, a number of Irish texts edited by Van Hamel

were published in the same journal.⁹⁷ With this, he had proven himself as one of the upcoming scholars in the field of Celtic studies. Van Hamel had managed to make a name for himself before he had even turned thirty. But although the leading celticists of the day were now usually personally acquainted with him, he was still largely unknown in Dutch academia. It would take him most of the next decade to gain a firm footing in his native country, and once again did not succeed without suffering controversy and setbacks.⁹⁸ Even with his background and connections, Van Hamel still had to prove himself – and in this sense, he remained 'as yet incomplete'.



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⁹⁵ Thurneysen 1915. According to Meyer, Van Hamel had studied Thurneysen's brief article in great detail, see Flahive 2009, 88-89.

⁹⁶ Van Hamel 1915-1916b. He had first sounded out Best in December 1914 on whether *Ériu* might be interested in an article on the subject, VH to R. I. Best (8-12-1914), NLI.

⁹⁷ Van Hamel 1915-1916c and 1915-1916d. In both cases, owing to the difficulties of international communication during the First World War, the revised versions were published. This was rectified in the following year. See also UBU, Archief Van Hamel, B7 and B6 for his preliminary work; including a translation of the poem on Crimthann that was never published. He had copied the texts from the manuscripts in the Royal Library in Brussels in 1913, see the letter from VH to R. I. Best (30-1-1918), NLI. See also the contribution by Ranke de Vries in this volume.

⁹⁸ See the next chapter in this volume.

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‘That mad ambition of mine’: A. G. van Hamel in Bonn during the First World War

BART JASKI

One of the most striking events in the life of A. G. van Hamel was his professorship in Bonn during the First World War. He was 28 years old when he finally saw his long-held ambition fulfilled, after an earlier attempt to become professor of English in Amsterdam had ended in failure.¹ However, his posting in Bonn would prove to be fraught with both major and minor obstacles that would leave him in a quandary on several occasions.

The First World War broke out in late July 1914, and by early August German forces were advancing through neutral Belgium into France. Van Hamel was in Sweden at the time and had to make his way back to Rotterdam, where he taught Dutch at the Erasmiaans Gymnasium, via Norway and England. In Bonn, the Dutchman Johannes Franck (1854-1914) had held a personal chair since 1886 and was made full professor of Dutch and Dutch philology in 1912. When he passes away on 23 January 1914, his chair becomes vacant.² Van Hamel is eventually appointed as his successor, and he is supposed to begin on 1 October, at the start of the winter semester of 1914-1915.³ But Van Hamel has no intention whatsoever of moving to Germany during the war. He writes to his Irish friend and fellow scholar Richard Irvine Best (1872-1959) that he has moral qualms about living in that land of murderers and traitors; who knows, they might even invade Holland, like they did Belgium.⁴ Bonn does offer a good stepping stone towards the kind of academic career he aspires to in the Netherlands, but for now he will stay in Rotterdam and act as a waystation for mail between celticists in Germany and Ireland and elsewhere abroad. His friend Kuno Meyer (1858-1919) still drops by for a visit in November 1914, in transit for a tour of the United States. Van Hamel is not much taken with Meyer’s nationalist views and his friendship with the German celticist cools, but he continues to correspond with him.⁵

Off to Bonn

In Bonn, they are far from happy with Van Hamel’s request for a delay, and the rector, in common with many of the students, questions whether this Dutchman is at all sympathetic to the German cause.⁶ In March 1915, Van Hamel finally makes his way to Bonn, not wishing to ruin his prospects. He sends a letter to Best, stating, with a fair bit of sarcasm, that he will be teaching sixty ladies and six gentlemen; the latter figure, however, will soon rise due to the steady influx of one-legged or blind casualties of war.⁷ He would end up teaching four courses, covering Gothic, Old Saxon, Middle Dutch poetry and the Early Modern Dutch poet Joost van den Vondel.⁸ He meets the German celticist Rudolf Thurneysen (1857-1940), and finds him to be a kind man, who says little about the war or Meyer’s conduct. After some time, Van Hamel finds himself a pleasant apartment at 49 Venusbergweg, at the corner of the Reuterstraße and overlooking the Botanical Gardens of the Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms Universität. This is a comfort in an otherwise bleak period of time when food is plain, the general mood depressed and company rare. He expects the war to continue for several years. He only cheers up when he is able to visit his parents in Amsterdam and when he gets to take leave from June to August. While in the Netherlands, he writes to Best and openly reports on life in Bonn – as would never have passed the German censors – and how the Germans appear resolved to regard themselves as the victims of a war they must, and will, win.

Loneliness

Over the course of 1915, conditions deteriorate and Van Hamel’s life in Bonn grows ever more austere, oppressive and lonely. His objections to the German take on the war become known to the German authorities. Their concern grows when he returns to the Netherlands for some time during the winter of 1915-1916. He delivers

¹ See the previous chapter in this volume.

² Grave 2012.

³ Grave 2018, who comments in his introduction: ‘Die twee jaar in Bonn zijn in Van Hamels levensloop vrijwel te verwaarlozen’ (‘Those two years in Bonn are of little account in the span of Van Hamel’s life’).

⁴ VH to R. I. Best (26-8-1914), NLI.

⁵ Ó Lúing 1991, 164-166, 176; compare VH’s letters to R. I. Best (26-11-1914 and 7-4-1916), NLI.

⁶ Grave 2018, 41, where he draws on a letter from the rector to the Prussian minister of Education in Berlin, which may be found in the archives of the University of Bonn, in the file on Van Hamel. See also the contribution by Alderik Blom in this volume.

⁷ VH to R. I. Best (9-3-1915), NLI.

⁸ Grave 2018, 42.

four lectures that will form the basis of his *Inleiding tot de Keltische taal- en letterkunde* ('Introduction to Celtic linguistics and literature'),⁹ published in 1917, the first substantial modern treatise on the subject in the Dutch language. However, the Germans are now keeping tabs on him. In February 1916, the authorities in Berlin inform the University of Bonn that Van Hamel forms part of a Dutch grouping hostile to German policies, which includes his brother who, as editor of *De (Groene) Amsterdammer*, has taken a clear stand against the Germans.¹⁰ Van Hamel's colleagues in Bonn should be cautious in their conversations with him since he might disseminate unfavourable reports in the Netherlands. Moreover, Van Hamel should no longer be issued with the requisite documents allowing him to visit the Netherlands. Van Hamel had been automatically naturalised as a Prussian citizen upon his appointment as professor in Bonn, but had retained his Dutch passport and citizenship.¹¹ Consequently, Van Hamel was still able to travel. In March 1916, he teaches Irish and Welsh literature with great success while on holiday (probably in Amsterdam).¹² When he returns to Amsterdam for just over a week in the summer, Van Hamel adds the last extended narrative entry to his diary, and this also marks the last time he addresses himself and considers his personal development as a human being. It is 15 June 1916, a few weeks before his thirtieth birthday.

Many Bonnish seasons have passed, and yet I wrote nothing down. Naturally, as for I did not experience much in my first year over there. I came to know absolute solitude, not to my undivided pleasure, but it also led me to increase my mastery of myself. The latter now seems to be complete – a happy event. However, I did not experience any enhancement of my own inner life in that first year. I did make scientific progress, became more solid and self-confident, but in that respect there is still much to be achieved. My experience of humanity was not much enhanced, and only my intermittent stays in Holland were invariably delightful and led to a taste of genuine

youthful joy, such as I had known only in Middelburg. On the other hand, upon my return, the pressures of the German wartime climate were once again very strong and sometimes brought me to despair. But I must persevere – for future's sake. When will I ever be allowed to think of the present? The second year in Bonn, however, has brought good news. I am warmer and more cheerful of character than I have been for a long time; more serious and sound, too. I have regained a sense of pure spiritual delight, which makes me happier than any of the petty pleasures that I sometimes pursue too fiercely.¹³

Van Hamel struggles with his sense of loneliness, which he both seeks and damns, attempts to rein in his emotions, and still harbours unfulfilled scholarly ambitions. His stay in Bonn is a sacrifice he must make if he is to advance. The single most enjoyable thing in his life at the time is his friendship with the young Wim Feltkamp.¹⁴

I owe a lot of my newfound enthusiasm to Wim Feltkamp. I first got to know him in Rotterdam, where he was conscripted. I subsequently ran into him again in Amsterdam. We talked for a few evenings, spent a full day cycling together through the area affected by the recent floods and spent a few days in Vierhouten. We drew increasingly close, especially in Vierhouten. Now we are very close friends; I love him very much and owe him a lot for my moral and spiritual revival. I do not know whether it is right for me to have such a young friend, but I could not help myself. And it offers me support – which I can certainly use.¹⁵

Poems entitled 'Eenzaamheid' ('Loneliness'), 'Plicht' ('Duty'), 'Het wonder' ('The miracle'), 'Bezieling' ('Inspiration') and 'Aan mijn lijf' ('To my body') reflect the issues that occupy him most that summer. However, this soon changes when the German authorities start exerting pressure on him.

9 Van Hamel 1917a. As to the four lectures, see the text of the Rouwzitting van de Senaat van de Rijksuniversiteit Utrecht ('Mourning session of the senate of Utrecht University') (26-11-1945), p. 2, NA, 307.

10 See also Moeyes 2001, 315, 323.

11 Grave 2018, 42.

12 VH to R. I. Best (7-4-1916), NLI.

13 Diary, pp. 38-39, NA, 298: 'Er zijn al vele Bonnsche perioden voorbij gegaan, en ik schreef toch niets op. Natuurlijk want ik heb in het eerste jaar daarginds weinig doorgemaakt. Ik leerde het absolute alleen-zijn kennen, niet tot mijn onverdeeld genoegen, maar tevens tot vermeerdering van mijne heerschappij over mijzelf. Deze laatste schijnt nu wel volkomen gevonden te zijn – een heugelijk feit. Mijn eigen innerlijk leven voelde ik echter in dat eerste jaar weinig rijker worden. Wetenschappelijk ging ik wel vooruit, werd ik vaster en zelfbewuster, maar in dat opzicht is toch nog veel te bereiken. Mijn mensch-zijn verruimde zich niet veel, alleen waren de intermitterende verblijven in Holland altijd overheerlijk en leidden tot het smaken van echt jonge vreugde, gelijk ik die alleen in Middelburg gekend had. Daarentegen was de druk van het Deutsche oorlogsmilieu daarna weer heel sterk en bracht mij soms tot vertwijfeling. Maar ik moet volhouden – voor de toekomst. Wanneer zal ik ooit aan het heden mogen denken? Het tweede Bonnsche jaar bracht echter goed nieuws. Ik ben innerlijk warmer en opgewekter dan sedert lang; ook ernstiger en degelijker. Ik smaak weer een rein geestelijk genot, dat mij gelukkiger maakt dan de soms te heftig nagejaagde pretjes'.

14 The art theorist Wim C. Feltkamp (1898-1974). Van Hamel introduced him to the Rotterdam branch of the student union UNICA, see W. Feltkamp to VH (10 and 12-11-1914 and 25-12-1915), NA, 296, in letters full of excessively student-like jargon. Feltkamp married Sijtje Grietje Mehrengs (1909-1986) in 1936.

15 Diary, p. 39, NA, 298: 'Veel van mijn nieuwe inspiratie heb ik te danken aan Wim Feltkamp. Ik heb hem voor 't eerst nader leeren kennen in Rotterdam, waar hij gemobiliseerd was. Vervolgens vond ik hem in Amsterdam terug. We praatten een paar avonden, fietsten een heele dag samen door het watersnoodgebied en brachten een paar dagen in Vierhouten door. Zoo kwamen we steeds nader tot elkaar, vooral in Vierhouten. Nu zijn wij heel intieme vrienden; ik houd ontzaglijk veel van hem en ik heb hem voor mijn morele en geestelijke opheffing veel te danken. Ik weet niet, of het goed van mij is, zulk een jongen vriend te hebben, maar ik kon niet anders. En ik heb er een houvast aan – wat ik best gebruiken kan'.

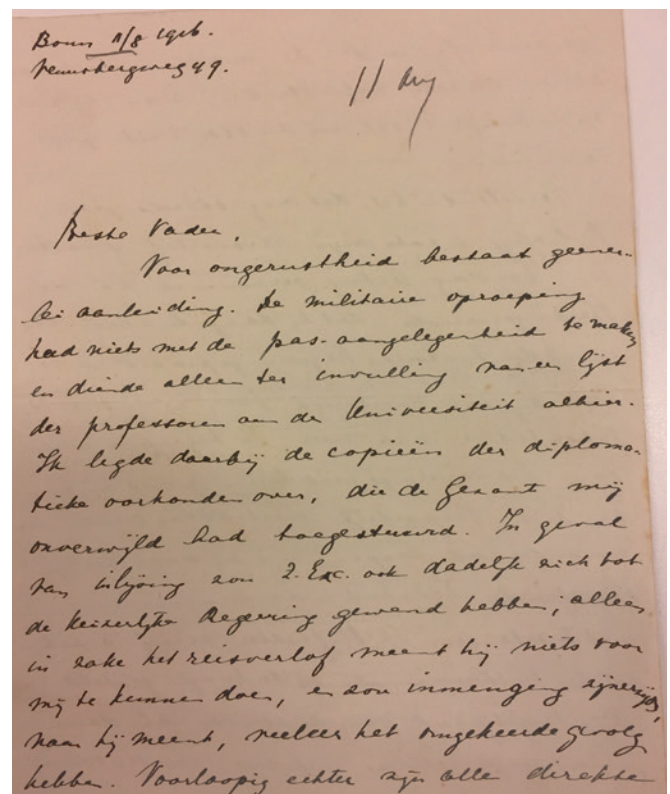
Attempt at flight

In early August 1916, at the end of the summer term, Van Hamel intends to return to the Netherlands, but does not manage to obtain a travel permit. In fact, he is told to stay in Bonn.¹⁶ He later offers the following explanation for this unexpected refusal in a letter to his mother:

Mr. Thurneysen, who has returned from his country residence, was the first to openly acknowledge to me that he considered the manifesto of the Dutch professors, which had already caused me so much misery in July, to be a sufficient reason not to permit me to travel, especially considering the identity of its first signatory. That manifesto has legitimately aroused appalling bitterness over here, of which I am thus said to be the victim.¹⁷

It is not clear what manifesto Van Hamel is referring to, but he had certainly aroused some measure of outrage himself when, in July, he told his German colleagues that one should not trust all that was written in the newspapers.¹⁸ Although he was factually correct about German wartime propaganda, this did not go down well. The university found itself at a loss over the whole issue, and it was decided to offer Van Hamel a way out: the university's *Kurator* asked him if he would like to be considered for a secondment to the *Vlaamsche Hoogeschool* ('Flemish College') in Ghent, which had been founded in 1916 by the German occupiers. He also urged Van Hamel to be more cautious, because the military authorities were well aware of his brother's activities and were 'seeking revenge'. Van Hamel refused; only later did he grasp that they had sought to offer him a legitimate reason to leave. It was a 'significant lesson' for Van Hamel.¹⁹

The sequence of events is not entirely clear, but it is certain that in early August 1916, when it became apparent that he had been denied a travel permit to go to the Netherlands and was forced to remain in Bonn, Van Hamel decided in desperation to 'play the part of Hugo de Groot'.²⁰ In his letter to his mother dated 25 August, he offers a more detailed account of his attempt at escape:



▲ Fig. 1. Letter from Van Hamel to his parents dated 8 August 1916. The Hague, Nationaal Archief, 2.21.081 (Archief van J.A. van Hamel), no. 292.

Having said that, I must tell you of a little prank, about which you must not get upset, although you will probably think it to have been "truly ill-advised". When I did not get leave to travel, I tried to cross the border with the help of someone recommended to me for the purpose! But, of course, we were detained and brought before the cavalry captain, who interrogated me and treated me very decently. He sent me home by evening. I was then fined by the *Kriegsgericht* ['court-martial'] and sentenced to one day's detention, because I had failed to present myself to the police in Bonn! So I had myself a romantic adventure

¹⁶ VH to Best (25-10-1916), NLI; VH to his mother (31-8-1916), NA, 292.

¹⁷ VH to his mother (31-8-1916), NA, 292: 'De Heer Thurneysen, die van zijn buitenverblijf teruggekeerd is, was de eerste die mij openlijk bekende, dat hij in het manifest der Holl(andse) Professoren, waarvan ik in Juli al zooveel ellende had, een afdoende reden zag, om mij niet te laten reizen, vooral in verband met den eersten onderteekenaar daarvan. Dat manifest heeft hier terecht ontzaglijke verbittering gewekt, waarvan ik dus het slachtoffer zou zijn'.

¹⁸ VH to Best (25-10-1916), NA, 292.

¹⁹ VH to his father (8-9-1916), NA, 292: 'duchtige les'; VH to R. I. Best (25-10-1916), NLI. The *Vlaamsche Hoogeschool* in Ghent ended in failure, and those who had backed it were considered to have been collaborators after the First World War.

²⁰ VH to his father (14-8-1916), NA, 292: 'Hugo de Groot te spelen'; Hugo Grotius (1583-1645) famously escaped imprisonment from Loevestein Castle by being smuggled out in a book chest. Van Hamel describes these events as if they happened before the issue of military service came to the fore. The latter issue also comes up in his letter of 11-8-1916, but he does not mention an attempted escape in that letter. The attempt had either already taken place – he mentions it in passing in his letter of 14-8-1916 – or took place between 11 and 14 August. In his letter to R. I. Best of 25-10-1916, NLI, he relates the story in the order observed in this chapter. Grave, 2018, 42, also observes this sequence of events. However, see also note 22.

for once, which I will tell you all about later; it was full of funny events. In the Holl(ändische) Club they laughed their heads off.²¹

This story was still told many years later. In her reminiscences about Van Hamel, Maartje Draak notes that he never related anything of his years in Bonn 'except for the story of his botched escape – disguised in a blue boezeroen ['workman's shirt'] etc! – when he [...] tried to escape to the Netherlands and was stopped near the border'.²² But although Van Hamel makes light of his arrest at Kaldenkirchen near Venlo and his fine of 800 marks,²³ he must surely have been in the depths of despair. To make matters worse, the German military raises various questions and demands clarification on a number of issues, including his retention of his Dutch passport. Van Hamel worries he may be called up for military service, since he is employed as a professor at a Prussian university, even though he had been exempted from this upon arrival in Bonn.²⁴ But as early as 11 August, he is able to reassure his father:

There is no cause for alarm. The military summons was completely unrelated to the matter of the travel permit and was merely intended to supply a list of the professors at the local University. I submitted the copies of the diplomatic charter, which the [Dutch] Minister had sent me without delay. Moreover, in the event of enlistment, His Excellency would have immediately reached out to the Imperial Government; it is only as regards the travel permit that he deems himself unable to intercede on my behalf [...]. The local military authorities, which are very well disposed to me, knew nothing about the matter and are now making inquiries.²⁵

This stands in stark contrast to how he relates the story, more candidly, to Best: he had been ordered to submit his name for enlistment in the army, and he was saved only by the protestations of the Dutch minister. Subsequently, they claimed it had all been a 'mistake'.

Van Hamel could not comprehend why he, the most innocent person in the world, was being treated like a criminal or spy.²⁶ The truth of the matter must surely lie somewhere in between the reassuring and cautious words addressed to his father and the embellished story told to Best. That said, it seems likely that the military authorities intended to put pressure on Van Hamel by threatening him with enlistment in the army.

Days of disappointment and hardship

Van Hamel did not abandon his attempts to leave Germany. He now argued that he could not prepare his lectures without conducting prior research in Dutch libraries, and that some of his students would be left unable to take their final exams. In other words, he was asking to go on an official trip. He only cited his father's poor health as a secondary reason, but this evidently weighed much more heavily on his mind, in addition to his loneliness in Bonn. Term was over, everyone was off on holiday, the library was closed and he had little material on hand. He had submitted his application to the mayor of Bonn, who had forwarded it to the *Regierungspräsidium* ('regional government') of Cologne a day or two before 6 August 1916. However, the latter rejected his application between 11 and 14 August. His appeal to the minister for Culture had not yet elicited a response.²⁷ This plunged Van Hamel's mood to an all-time low. He had shared out his parents' food parcels to others prior to his escape attempt, and on his return he had dry bread and a cup of hot water for breakfast 'like a veritable prisoner'.²⁸ However, this turn of events also gave him time to reflect on his situation. He wrote to his father:

But I have this trait in common with you, that I find it hard to bear adversity and then become so deeply miserable that I can no longer see any way out, while the straight path is right in front of me and I could calmly carry on, if only I did not get so worked up.²⁹

This is reinforced by his loneliness: he has no one to pour his heart out to. He also admits that things had thus

²¹ VH to his mother (25-8-1916), NA, 292: 'Nu moet ik U nog een grap vertellen, waarover U niet boos worden mag, al zult U het wel "echt onverstandig" van me vinden. Toen het reisverlof niet kwam, heb ik geprobeerd met een mij daartoe aanbevolen persoon over de grens te komen! Maar wij werden natuurlijk aangehouden en voor den ritmeester gebracht, die mij verhoorde en heel geschikt behandelde. Hij zond me 's avonds naar huis terug. Van 't Kriegsgericht kreeg ik daarop een boete te betalen en 1 dag hechtenis, omdat ik mij in Bonn niet bij de politie had afgemeld! Zoo heb ik ook eens een romantisch avontuur gehad, dat ik U later nog in kleuren en geuren vertel, het was vol comische incidenten. In de Holl(ändische) Club hebben ze er tranen om gelachen'.

²² Draak 1947, 75: 'behalve het verhaal van zijn mislukte vlucht – in vermomming van blauw boezeroen etc.! – toen hij [...] naar Nederland trachtte te ontkomen en vlak bij de grens werd aangehouden'. However, Draak states that he fled in order to dodge conscription. See also Hammerich 1973, 73, for a somewhat muddled recollection of what Van Hamel had told him about his time in Bonn: 'He spoke reluctantly of that time' ('Han talte nødigt om den tid').

²³ Grave 2018, 41; VH to R. I. Best (25-10-1916), NLI.

²⁴ Grave 2018, 40.

²⁵ VH to his father (11-8-1916), NA, 292: 'Voor ongerustheid bestaat geenerlei aanleiding. De militaire oproeping had niets met de pas-aangelegenheid te maken en diende alleen ter invulling van een lijst der professoren aan de Universiteit alhier. Ik legde daarbij de copieën der diplomatieke oorkonde over, die de [Nederlandse] Gezant mij onverwijld had toegestuurd. In geval van inlijving zou Z(ijne) Exc(ellentie) ook dadelijk zich tot de Keizerlijke Regering gewend hebben; alleen in zake het reisverlof meent hij niets voor mij te kunnen doen [...]. De militaire overheid alhier, die zeer welwillend is, was van niets op de hoogte en zal nu ambtsinlichtingen inwinnen'.

²⁶ VH to R. I. Best (25-10-1916), NLI.

²⁷ VH to his father (11 and 14-8-1916), NA, 292.

²⁸ VH to his parents, NA, 292: 'als een waar gevangene'.

²⁹ VH to his father, NA, 292: 'Ik heb echter deze eigenschap met U gemeen, dat ik slecht tegen tegenspoed kan en dan zoo diep ongelukkig word dat ik geen uitweg meer zie, terwijl de rechte weg vóór me ligt en ik rustig zou kunnen doorloopen, als ik mij maar niet zoo opwond'.

far always gone his way, and that he now realises that dealing with setbacks may actually make him stronger. He feels embarrassed for his ‘childish excitement during the days of disappointment’ which he had also related to his parents. He now feels calm, is resigned to his fate, and suffers only from ‘the tedium of eternal waiting’.³⁰ He also reassures his mother:

It is quite good for me to have experienced something that I found deeply distressing. It strengthens a man and one gets more accustomed to adversity. I also merited some measure of punishment for that mad ambition of mine to be a professor à tout prix [‘at all costs’]. I got my way, but now I have to pay for it.³¹

On 24 August, a fresh parcel arrives from his mother, and the next day Van Hamel dines on three slices of bread with butter and herring fillet. ‘I never knew there were such delicious things in the world’.³² For three weeks, he had been without adequate food, so much so that his clothes did not fit properly anymore. Copies of the Dutch newspaper *NRC* also made their way to Van Hamel, keeping him informed of news from the Netherlands. He has started writing again, and his upstairs neighbour, a private tutor, is back, so he has somebody to talk to again. Van Hamel keeps his spirits up. In the meantime, there is no way out of his predicament: having illegally left Bonn during his flight, he has been sentenced to one day’s imprisonment, and he cannot reapply for a travel permit until he has served it, and he cannot resign his job until he has leave to return to the Netherlands. By now he has decided that he would gladly surrender his post in Bonn for the chance to go home.³³ There are limits to his ambition.

Back home again

On 2 September, the minister of Culture finally informs Van Hamel that the issue of his travel permit may be taken into consideration once he has served the sentence for his attempted escape. He is also ordered to pay the fine, which he promptly settles, but he still has to go to jail. ‘And so I hope that the welcoming doors of prison will soon open for me, to admit me for a day into that antechamber of salvation’.³⁴ Things are moving forward. By late August, the German Legation in The Hague had reexamined his case and concluded that a travel permit could be issued.³⁵ Still, it would take until

4 October until the all-clear was given and Van Hamel was granted four weeks’ leave.³⁶ ‘I am almost tempted to believe in miracles, because I had already given up any hope of seeing my country again’, he later described his feelings to Best. He resolves never to return, and considers the authorities in Bonn to have been rather foolish for not making him promise to return.³⁷ He is less outspoken in his letter to the *Kurator* dated 7 October: he thanks him and indicates that he had resigned because he foresaw that his working conditions and ability to travel would only deteriorate because of the war. He regrets it, but is compelled to take this decision at a time when military interests trump those of culture.³⁸ The University of Bonn discharges Van Hamel,³⁹ and with that his tenure as professor is over and he becomes an unemployed civilian in the midst of a war. His German colleagues do not take kindly to him: he hears no more from Kuno Meyer or his sister Toni, with whom he had been on such good terms before the war.⁴⁰ And so the First World War had also split the international community of celticists, and Van Hamel was forced to pick a side. Opting for a middle way – being anti-German but still heading for Bonn – ended up resulting mainly in misery and uncertainty.

Epilogue: Van Hamel becomes a professor of Celtic

In October 1916, Van Hamel is back in the Netherlands. He is unable to resume teaching at the Gymnasium in Rotterdam, and his father ultimately passes away on 1 March in the harsh winter of 1917, never having stopped attending sessions of the Lower House of parliament. He had just turned 75. Fortunately, by this time Van Hamel has secured a job as (head) librarian of the Rotterdamse Handelsschool (‘Rotterdam School of Commerce’). He seems content, joking to Best that he prefers working in a library in his own country to studying the difference between a professor and a prisoner among ‘our dear neighbours’ (the Germans). However, he still aspires to become a professor at one of the Dutch universities.⁴¹ By the end of 1918, he is again complaining:

You once wrote to me that all librarians are cranks and to be avoided. I cannot but acquiesce in this verdict. What is left of me after a year and a half’s hard work in this branch, is only a shadow of a human being. [...] spiritually I have become something of a

³⁰ VH to his father (11-8-1916), NA, 292: ‘kinderachtige opwinding gedurende de dagen van teleurstelling’ and ‘onder de verveling van het eeuwige afwachten’.

³¹ VH to his mother (25-8-1916), NA, 292: ‘Het is wel gezond voor mij, dat ik eens iets heb moeten doormaken, dat ik heel erg naar vond. Dat sterkt den mensch weer wat aan en men went zich meer aan tegenspoed. Ook had ik wel wat straf verdiend voor die gekke eerezucht van mij, om à tout prix professor te willen zijn. Mijn zin heb ik nu, maar dan moet ik er ook maar voor betalen’.

³² VH to his parents, NA, 292: ‘Ik wist niet dat er zulke heerlijke dingen op de wereld zijn’.

³³ VH to his mother (31-8-1916), NA, 292.

³⁴ VH to his father (8-9-1916), NA, 292. It is his last known letter to his parents from Bonn.

³⁵ Grave 2018, 41.

³⁶ VH to R. I. Best (25-10-1916), NLI.

³⁷ VH to R. I. Best (25-10-1916), NLI.

³⁸ Grave 2018, 42.

³⁹ Grave 2018, 42, mentions the date of 1 October, but this cannot be correct.

⁴⁰ VH to Best (2-4-1917 and 26-6-1917), NLI. See further Ó Lúing 1991, 194-197, 219.

⁴¹ VH to Best (30-1-1918), NLI: ‘de lieve bureh’.

machine, not even capable of the energy required for the composition of another of those silly epistles, with which I am accustomed to disturb your peace.⁴²

Yet there is one thing he neglects to mention in his letter – the first one written to Best after a break of almost a year – namely that his attempt to secure a professorship had once again been frustrated. In 1918, Van Hamel published a 222-page monograph: *Zeventiende-eeuwsche opvattingen en theorieën over litteratuur in Nederland* ('Seventeenth-century views on and theories of literature in the Netherlands'). It covers the philosophical and aesthetic principles of writing poetry and plays in the seventeenth century – hardly a topic within Van Hamel's usual area of expertise. Yet he did occasionally venture into the field of Dutch language and literature in these years, and it was, after all, the discipline in which he had graduated.⁴³ Willem Kloos, the leading literary critic of his day, gave it a favourable review,⁴⁴ but after Van Hamel's death the verdict was: 'Although this work demonstrated thorough knowledge and his being very well-read, it was not judged entirely favourably. Van Hamel realised that such subjects would not offer him any satisfaction, and that he would do better not to extend his field of study too far beyond his favourite subject'.⁴⁵ There was more to it, however. It was much like in 1912. Back then, he had published an article to back-up his candidacy for the new chair of English in Amsterdam, but had been publicly rebuked.⁴⁶ Now he was getting embroiled in the succession of Jan te Winkel (1847-1927) as professor of 'Middle Dutch and modern Dutch language and literature'⁴⁷ at the (Municipal) University of Amsterdam. Marc Schneiders summarises the matter as follows:

The faculty had nominated Van Hamel to the municipal council for appointment. However, a veritable campaign got underway among literary scholars, which was picked up by the press, to get another candidate appointed to the position. It was pointed out that Van Hamel would not have the proper area of expertise for the chair and it was claimed that his

recent book, *Zeventiende-eeuwsche opvattingen en theorieën over litteratuur in Nederland* (1918), had been opportunistic and was lacking in quality.⁴⁸

The fact that the chair was being split up into two parts, with a literary and a linguistic component, formed a major aspect of the debate. On the linguistic side of things, there was already a professor at hand, i.e. Van Hamel's former supervisor, professor Richard Constant Boer (1863-1929). Van Hamel was harshly dismissed in *Elzevier*:

The Municipal Council of Amsterdam faces a difficult choice. Nevertheless, the young Dr. A. G. van Hamel, who has not yet accomplished great things in any field of study, should not feel in any way aggrieved, should he be rejected. The matter is not concerned with redressing disappointments suffered elsewhere, but rather with the education of our future teachers and, through them, of the future Dutch youth.⁴⁹

Van Hamel was not appointed.⁵⁰ One might accuse him of some expediency in publishing when he did, but his work was not without its merits, and he had shown that he could quickly master a field. But his predilections and expertise were overwhelmingly in the fields of Old Germanic and Celtic, while he was the odd one out in the discipline of Dutch language and literature. Van Hamel did not abandon the subject altogether in later years, but finds himself caught adrift for a few years after 1918, during which he tries to find a place for himself in academia while living in Rotterdam. Van Hamel remarks in a letter to Best that there are no opportunities in the field of Celtic.⁵¹ Consequently, he does not contribute anything substantial during these years. He does submit an edition and translation of a Brussels manuscript on 'The twelve apostles of Ireland' to *Ériu* via Best, but it turns out that Charles Plummer is already preparing an edition of Irish hagiographical texts, and the project is shelved.⁵² In the long run, however, he ends up being successful, and on 29 October 1920 Van Hamel gives the very first lecture on Celtic at

⁴² VH to Best (31-12-1918), NLI.

⁴³ Van Hamel 1915c, 1916c, 1917c, 1918a, 1919c, 1920f, 1921c.

⁴⁴ Kloos 1918.

⁴⁵ 'In memoriam A. G. van Hamel (Rouwzitting van de Senaat, 26 Nov. 1945)', delivered by the Dutch linguist and literary scholar Cornelis Gerrit Nicolaas de Vooys (1873-1955), typescript, NA, 307: 'Hoewel dit werk de bewijzen leverde van grondige kennis en grote belezenheid, was de beoordeling niet onverdeeld gunstig. Van Hamels zelfkennis deed hem inzien dat dergelijke onderwerpen hem niet voldoening zouden schenken, en dat hij beter zou doen, zijn studieterrein niet te ver buiten zijn lievelingsonderwerp uit te breiden'.

⁴⁶ See the previous chapter in this volume.

⁴⁷ 'Midden-Nederlandsch en de nieuwe Nederlandsche taal- en letterkunde'.

⁴⁸ Schneiders 2002: 'De faculteit had Van Hamel voor benoeming voorgedragen aan de gemeenteraad. Er ontstond echter een ware campagne onder letterkundigen, die niet onopgemerkt bleef door de pers, om een andere kandidaat op deze post te krijgen. Er werd op gewezen dat Van Hamel niet de juiste specialisatie zou hebben voor de leeropdracht en dat zijn recente boek, *Zeventiende-eeuwsche opvattingen en theorieën over litteratuur in Nederland* (1918), niet meer dan een gelegenheidspublicatie zou zijn en kwaliteit zou ontberen'.

⁴⁹ Robbers 1918, 206: 'De Gemeenteraad van Amsterdam staat voor een lastige keuze. Doch de jeugdige Dr. A. G. van Hamel, die nog op geen enkel gebied groote dingen gedaan heeft, zal zich geenszins gekrenkt mogen achten, zoo men hém terzijde stelt. Het geldt hier niet vergoeding te bieden voor elders geleden teleurstelling, het geldt de opleiding onzer toekomstige leeraars en, door hen, van de nederlandsche jeugd der toekomst'.

⁵⁰ Robbers 1918, 206. Te Winkel had formally retired in September 1918, but would ultimately stay on until he was succeeded in mid-1919 by two professors of Dutch language and literature, Frederik August Stoett and Jacob Prinsen.

⁵¹ VH to R. I. Best (27-8-1919), NLI.

⁵² VH to R. I. Best (30-1-1918, 3-3-1919 and 27-8-1919), NLI. See also UBU, Archief Van Hamel, B 9. The edition published in Plummer 1922, I, 96-102, does not include the Brussels manuscript, even though Van Hamel had told Best that he could send his edition on to Plummer. See also the contribution by Ranke de Vries in this volume.

a Dutch university. In Leiden, he is invited to serve as *privaatdocent* ('independent lecturer'), and delivers a public lecture, entitled *Isolement en gemeenschap* ('Isolation and community').⁵³ In retrospect, this was of decisive importance for the academic study of Celtic in the Netherlands. He writes to Best expressing both his great pride at being the prophet of Celtic in the Netherlands and his hope, not just for himself, that all of his efforts will eventually result in the establishment of a chair.⁵⁴ It would still take a bit longer for that to happen, but Van Hamel does get students of Old Irish, and he is also asked to teach Welsh in the academic year 1921-1922. It certainly keeps him busy on top of his new job as librarian at the Peace Palace, situated in a beautiful building and with ample funds. But all the same, could they not just give him a chair of Celtic in Leiden? He laments the fact that even in a country full of millionaires it is still not possible to find money for such a purpose.⁵⁵ A chair would ultimately be established, but in Utrecht and paired with Old Germanic.

In 1916, Van Hamel's first article in the field of Old Germanic studies, on Gothic, had appeared in the first issue of *Neophilologus*. He was also working on a *Gotisch handboek* ('Handbook of Gothic'), which was published in 1923.⁵⁶ In the same year, an opportunity presents itself in Utrecht. Johannes J. A. A. Frantzen (1853-1923), professor of 'the principles of comparative Germanic linguistics, the ancient languages and literatures of the Germanic peoples and High German language and literature',⁵⁷ falls ill early in 1923.⁵⁸ He is almost 75 years old, and given that a timely recovery is becoming increasingly unlikely, the university decides to release him from his duties and starts looking for a successor. With prof. Frantzen catering to approximately fifty students, the matter is of some importance, but it seems impossible to have both disciplines, Old Germanic and High German, be covered by any one scholar. On 6 June, the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy makes its recommendation to the Board of Trustees. They list three names with a detailed description of their respective merits: Van Hamel, the slightly younger and gifted Jan de Vries (1890-1964), who would later make a name for himself in Leiden, and Moritz Schönfeld (1880-1958). Regarding Van Hamel, the list refers to his professorship in Bonn, his dissertation and article on Gothic, his lectures in

Leiden and his *Zeventiende-eeuwsche opvattingen*, about which it is said that it had gotten a favourable review, but that Van Hamel had ultimately rejected the chair of Medieval Dutch Literature because he had been fundamentally opposed to splitting up prof. Winkel's chair. 'A fine-mannered and learned man of extensive knowledge and proficiency in foreign languages. He is our only Celticist, a subject which is of great importance for the study of the Western European ecclesiastical and secular literature of the Middle Ages'. The Board adopts the Faculty's recommendation, and it is only then that Van Hamel is informed. In a letter dated 9 July, he responds to 'a very pleasant announcement'; he would 'most certainly accept' his appointment.⁵⁹ To Best he writes that he is happy to be teaching, especially at a university, because that is 'the great pleasure of my life'. And yet it was hard 'to bid farewell to the gorgeous halls and beautiful gardens of the Peace Palace, and especially to the fine library, where my work gave me so much satisfaction'.⁶⁰

It is remarkable to note that Van Hamel's broad range of knowledge and his merits in the field of Celtic are now viewed in a positive light, and that his position in Bonn also stood him in good stead. Navigating his way through various different fields of study had proven to be a sound course in the end, and one that would allow him to bring in a major haul. Van Hamel is appointed by Royal Decree as professor of 'The principles of comparative Germanic linguistics, the ancient languages and literatures of the Germanic peoples' with an annual salary of fl. 7500,- on 3 August.⁶¹ He delivers his oration on 'Tendencies in Germanic antiquity' on 22 October.⁶² Celtic is nowhere mentioned in his correspondence with the university. In her necrology of Van Hamel, Maartje Draak states that: 'At his request, his commission was extended to include the teaching of Celtic, so that he could continue an occupation he had entered into three years earlier as *privaatdocent* ('independent lecturer') in Leiden'.⁶³ There is nothing of Van Hamel's request in the official records. On 31 October, the Board of Trustees writes a note to the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy: 'The question has arisen whether prof. dr. A. G. van Hamel, who, we believe, occupies a prominent position among the practitioners of Celtic, might be willing to accept an extension of his commission to include

⁵³ Van Hamel 1920b.

⁵⁴ VH to R. I. Best (17-10-1920), NLI.

⁵⁵ VH to R. I. Best (4-9-1921), NLI.

⁵⁶ Van Hamel 1916b and 1923c; see also the contribution by Alderik Blom in this volume.

⁵⁷ 'De beginselen der vergelijkende Germaanse taalwetenschap, de oude talen en letterkunde der Germaanse volken en de Hoogduitse taal- en letterkunde'.

⁵⁸ Vonk 2009, 42-44. What follows is based mainly on Het Utrechts Archief, toegang 59 (College van Curatoren van de Rijksuniversiteit Utrecht), no. 687.

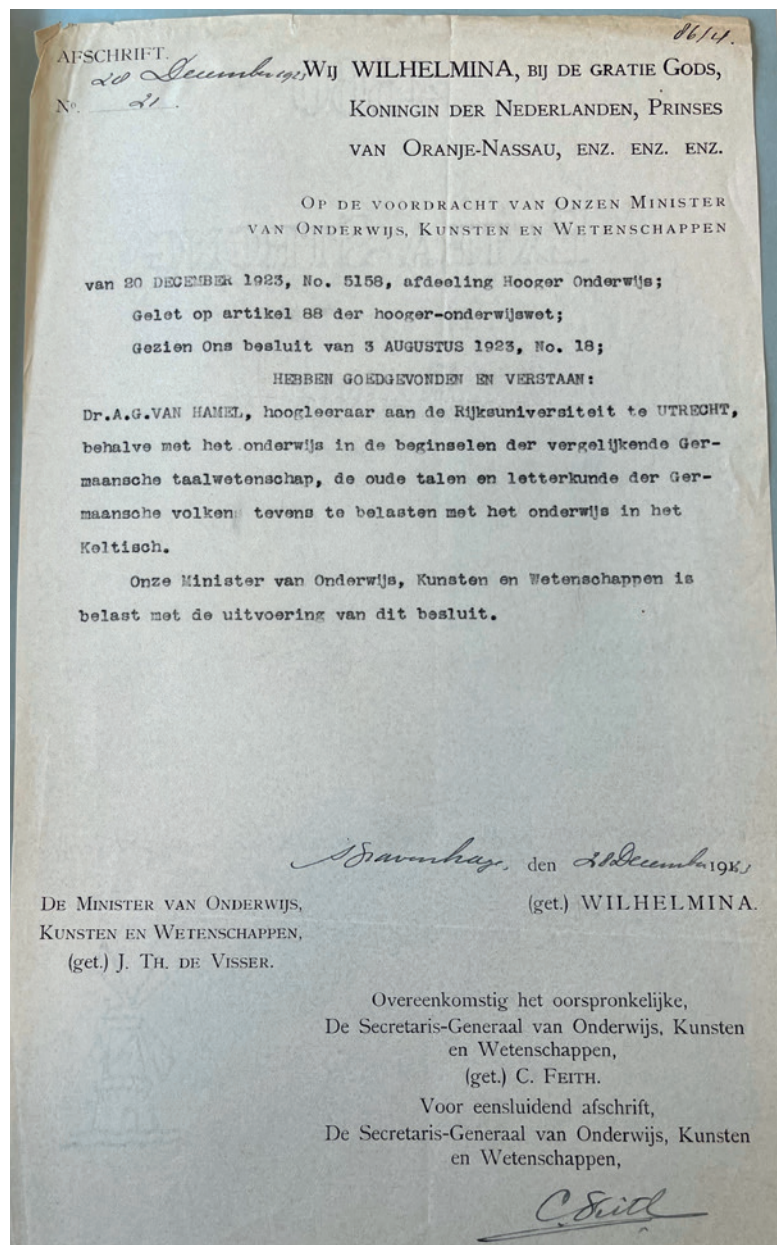
⁵⁹ 'een mij zeer aangename mededeeling'; 'stellig aanvaardden'.

⁶⁰ VH to Best (20-12-1923), NLI. Compare also his letter to R. I. Best (4-9-1921), NLI, where he voices his satisfaction with his new position in The Hague.

⁶¹ 'De beginselen der vergelijkende Germaansche taalwetenschap, de oude talen en letterkunde der Germaansche volken'.

⁶² 'Lijnen in de Germaansche oudheid'; Van Hamel 1923b.

⁶³ Draak 1947, 76: 'Op zijn verzoek werd de opdracht uitgebreid met het onderwijs in het Keltisch, zodat hij een werkzaamheid kon voortzetten die hij drie jaar eerder had aangevangen als *privaat-docent* te Leiden'. This has (understandably) been echoed by others, e.g. Boer-den Hoed 1948, 347; Veelenturf 1993, 18; Schneiders 2002.



➤ Fig. 2. The start of Celtic as an academic discipline in the Netherlands: copy of the Royal Decree issued on 28 December 1923, from the file in Het Utrechts Archief, toegang 59 (College van Curatoren van de Rijksuniversiteit Utrecht), no. 687.

said subject'.⁶⁴ They ask whether the Faculty agrees, and after Van Hamel also reacts favourably, the Board sends the Faculty formal notice on 17 November. On 28 December 1923, his original commission is extended by Royal Decree, 'also charging him with teaching Celtic'.⁶⁵

How had all this come about? As far as the records show, the Board of Trustees instigated the move to have Van Hamel also teach Celtic, and the Faculty concurred. When, upon Van Hamel's death, the issue of the chair of Old Germanic and Celtic is being debated, the Utrecht historian Pieter Geyl (1887-1966), acting on behalf of

the Faculty, writes to the Board of Trustees in August 1946 that the addition of Celtic to Van Hamel's commission arose 'from a misunderstanding. It was never the intention of the Faculty'.⁶⁶ Geyl may well have been pursuing a separate aim with this assertion, namely to ensure that Van Hamel would at the very least have a successor for the chair of Old Germanic studies. This was to be Van Hamel's Danish friend Louis Leonor Hammerich (1892-1975), who was appointed on 12 August 1946 with the same commission as Van Hamel, including Celtic, although he could not teach it. He returned to Denmark just over a year later.⁶⁷ Geyl appears

⁶⁴ Het Utrechts Archief, toegang 59 (College van Curatoren van de Rijksuniversiteit Utrecht), no. 687: 'Bij ons is de vraag gerezen, of prof. Dr. A. G. van Hamel, die, naar wij meenen, eene vooraanstaande plaats onder de beoefenaars van het Keltisch inneemt, wellicht bereid zoude kunnen worden bevonden, eene uitbreiding van zijne leeropdracht met genoemd vak te aanvaarden'.

⁶⁵ Het Utrechts Archief, toegang 59 (College van Curatoren van de Rijksuniversiteit Utrecht), no. 687: 'tevens te belasten met het onderwijs in het Keltisch'.

⁶⁶ Het Utrechts Archief, toegang 59 (College van Curatoren van de Rijksuniversiteit Utrecht), no. 687: 'uit een misverstand. Het was niet de bedoeling van de Faculteit'.

⁶⁷ See also the contribution by Alderik Blom in this volume.

to know nothing about any personal request by Van Hamel to broaden his commission. In a letter to Best, Van Hamel makes no mention of this either. He merely states that: 'They gave me an official appointment for Keltic at the university'.⁶⁸ If he had pulled this off by himself even in part, one would have expected him to have proudly told Best, although this brief mention of such a significant development is curious in any event. Neither is there any indication that Van Hamel had any key connections in the Board of Trustees, whose chairman in 1923 was Alexander Frederik baron van Lynden (1856-1931).

It may be that the Board of Trustees simply recognised that it was undesirable for Van Hamel to be both *privaat-docent* ('independent lecturer') in Celtic in Leiden and professor of Old Germanic in Utrecht, and that it was more convenient to combine the two in Utrecht. All the more so because this would both add a new element to the curriculum and allow Van Hamel to make use of his full potential. Moreover, the Faculty had already deemed Van Hamel's knowledge of Celtic to be an asset when they recommended him for the chair. This move also made it more natural to assign the chair of High

German, which Frantzen had also filled, to someone other than Van Hamel – a rather ironic development, in light of the events in Amsterdam in 1918. However, it is quite possible that the Board had been aware, either directly or indirectly, of Van Hamel's wishes, and they were able to use them to further their own strategic interests. And this may have made Van Hamel feel that a wish he had expressed (whether in passing or not) had yielded results. This must be how he then related the story to Draak, who only became acquainted with him in about 1930. The records do not reveal the underlying reasons, and apart from what Van Hamel himself wrote down and told to others, we have no further witnesses. We may, however, observe that Celtic was established as an academic discipline in Utrecht in 1923 because the Board of Trustees considered it to be of benefit to the university, and valued Van Hamel's expertise in this field of studies. In spite of both dangers and disruptions, Celtic has now existed in Utrecht for a hundred years: compelling evidence that the visions of Van Hamel, the Board of Trustees and the Faculty were right.

✎

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A. G. van Hamel's correspondence with Henry Parry-Williams

ANGHARAD PRICE

In early August 1907 the young student,¹ A. G. Van Hamel, wrote from the picturesque village of Betws y Coed in north Wales to a schoolmaster in rural Snowdonia, asking for instruction in Welsh.² The schoolmaster in question was Henry Parry-Williams (1858-1925), a progressive educationalist and experienced teacher of Welsh.³ Within days Van Hamel was welcomed to the Parry-Williams family home in the small, mountainous hamlet of Rhyd-ddu to begin his tuition, and thus began a warm friendship that was to last nearly twenty years.

Van Hamel's correspondence with Henry Parry-Williams numbers some twenty-three letters and postcards that are held today in the *Papers of T. H. Parry-Williams and Amy Parry-Williams* archive at the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth.⁴ Apart from the inaugural postcard in English, the correspondence, stretching from 1907 to 1923, was carried out entirely through the medium of Welsh which Van Hamel wrote eloquently. The letters in particular are a joy to read, and a concise summary such as this cannot do justice to their astute observations and the playful allusiveness of their style. In them, one can trace Van Hamel's development as a student of Celtic languages, his keen interest in people, as well as his incisive understanding of modern literature (including the early works of Henry's gifted son, the great poet and scholar, Thomas Henry Parry-Williams (1887-1975)). The letters also reveal Van Hamel's attempts to establish himself, as well as Celtic studies as a subject, within the higher education system in the Netherlands. Most of all, the correspondence testifies to a profound respect between teacher and student, and a moving personal attachment that survived two tumultuous decades.

Van Hamel was not the first continental scholar of Welsh to benefit from Henry Parry-Williams' renowned abilities as a teacher of modern Welsh. Heinrich Zimmer, follow-

ing a recommendation by T. Hudson Williams, spent a week at Rhyd-ddu in 1899, and a series of other scholars came after him, including Rudolf Imelmann, Kuno Meyer, Erik Björkman, Hermann Osthoff, Josef Baudiš, Joseph Vendryes, Rudolf Thurneysen and later Van Hamel's pupil Theodor Chotzen, all living with the family at the School House and immersing themselves in the rich Welsh-speaking life of the local community. Little wonder that Van Hamel, when writing to thank the family after his first visit there in 1907, jokingly referred to their home as *Athrofa Geltaidd, Rhyd-ddu* ('Celtic Academy, Rhyd-ddu'), an epithet he continued to use throughout his correspondence; and in a later letter he called Henry 'the source of all Welsh on the continent!'⁵ But there is little doubt that, of all the European scholars who were to visit the Parry-Williams family, Van Hamel enjoyed the closest and most long-lived friendship with them.

Van Hamel's Welsh

At Christmas 1907, four months after his first Welsh sojourn, Van Hamel wrote to Henry Parry-Williams with an update on his progress in the language, proudly reporting to have tackled a number of volumes on Welsh history and literature, including literary works ranging from the seventh to the eighteenth centuries. A striking aspect of his letters from the very beginning is the ease and fluency of their style which contains poetic touches, such as when he writes of his 'heartfelt longing' for 'beautiful Wales [...] covered in mist, with the wind and rain playing on Llyn y Gader lake and chilling the foot of Snowdon'.⁶ Some months later, in Spring 1908, he writes again of his longing to revisit the place 'where eagles lived', and of his desire 'to hear the pretty song of Welsh poetry and to breathe the fresh breeze of the mountains'.⁷ He mentions the possibility of calling at Rhyd-ddu on his way to the School of Irish Learning at Dublin that July, but two further postcards written from Ireland express his regrets that time had defeated him,

1 I would like to thank dr. Bleddyn Owen Huws and dr. Samuel Jones for helping me with retrieving some background details.

2 Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, *Papers of T. H. Parry-Williams and Amy Parry-Williams*, Llythyrau oddi wrth A. G. van Hamel, Amsterdam, Middelburg, Rotterdam ac Utrecht, 1907-1923 / Letters from A. G. van Hamel, Middelburg, Rotterdam and Utrecht, 1907-1923 (hereafter: 'Letters from A. G. van Hamel'), A28. In February 1908, he contacted R. I. Best about the possibilities of improving his Irish, see the contribution by Nike Stam in this volume.

3 See <https://biography.wales/article/s3-PARR-HEN-1858> (accessed on 10-1-2023).

4 'Letters from A. G. van Hamel', A25-A52. A further six letters from Van Hamel to T. H. Parry-Williams himself are held in the same archive (CH650-55). Sadly, Henry Parry-Williams' letters to Van Hamel have not survived.

5 'Letters from A. G. van Hamel, Middelburg, Rotterdam and Utrecht, 1907-1923', A44: 'ffynnon yr holl Gymraeg sydd ar y Cyfandir'. All quotations translated from Welsh by the present author. Punctuation, capitalization, and orthography reflect the original letters.

6 'Letters from A. G. van Hamel', A31: '[C]ymru brydferth [...] wedi cael ei [g]orchuddio gan y niwl; a'r gwynt a'r gwlaw yn chwareu ar Llyn y Gadar ac yn oeri traed yr Wyddfa'.

7 'Letters from A. G. van Hamel', A32: 'lle bu'r eryrod yn byw, i glywed cân tlws awen Cymru ac i anadlu awel wyrff y mynyddoedd'.

and that he was to dedicate his summer to learning Irish (and providing Henry with an address in Ballyferriter where he might contact him).⁸ In his annual Christmas letter to the Parry-Williams family in December 1908, he has interesting remarks to make on the differences he perceived between Wales and Ireland:

Ireland is a very lovely country; and those ‘old devils, the Irish’ are not as bad as your compatriots claim. Yet, I am not as fond of it as I am of Wales. The conditions of the common people are very bad, much worse than in Wales, and for that reason they have not as much morality. This is why your language and literature thrive much more. In addition, the Irish language is very difficult and I could not speak it as well as Welsh. Nevertheless, my Welsh is certainly not excellent either and I will need to spend time with you. The only thing I can do here is read, but I want to speak Welsh again!⁹

From the extant correspondence it seems that Van Hamel was not able to return to Rhyd-ddu for another three years. ‘I will come to Rhyd-ddu next Wednesday,’ he wrote excitedly to Henry in July 1911. ‘Will you let me to listen to you at the school?’¹⁰ Once again, the following Christmas missive reflects on a summer spent among the mountains of Wales: ‘Where are the blazing days of July and August when we were reading in the field?’ he laments, ‘They are gone irretrievably.’¹¹ Assuring Henry that he is ‘a much better Welshman now than before the last short visit to your country’, he nevertheless quips that Welsh represented to him not so much ‘the language of Heaven’ as the ‘infernal speech of the Devil’, an allusion to the satirical work of the eighteenth-century Anglican writer, Ellis Wynne, whose *Gweledigaethu y bardd cwsc* (‘Visions of the sleeping bard’) he had been studying.¹² But it is hard to pay credence to his protestations: his written Welsh is both largely grammatically correct and full of elegance and humour, and he also shows a willingness to adopt the colloquialisms of the modern spoken language, including borrowings from English such as *likio* and *drwg-iwsio*. Along with his enquiries about local Rhyd-ddu personalities (a character nicknamed ‘Bendigeit Vran’ seems to be a firm favourite), the

correspondence shows clearly that learning Welsh was not purely an academic or philological exercise for Van Hamel; he also embraced the modern living language, as well as its community of speakers.

A Welsh literary critic?

Van Hamel’s sharp sensibilities as a literary critic also come to the fore in these letters. In February 1912 he wrote in appreciation of Henry’s lyric poems on the subject of ‘village life’, which had won a prize at the 1910 National *Eisteddfod*, Wales’ annual festival of music and literature: ‘You have an unadorned and pictorial style which is essential to this type of poetry’, he commented.¹³ He then proceeds to analyse the winning *awdl* (a long poem in the traditional strict metres) from the same festival, namely *Yr haf* (‘The summer’) by Robert Williams Parry (Henry’s nephew, as it happens), and Van Hamel correctly prophesies that this *awdl* heralds a ‘new age in Welsh literature’.¹⁴ He expounds on his opinion in a later article about R. Williams Parry which he sends to Henry in September 1912, jesting that Dutch was not ‘a language of Hell’, and that he was to assure his nephew ‘that I do not say bad things about him’.¹⁵

However, it is in response to the poetry of Henry’s son, Thomas Henry Parry-Williams, who was bringing the first notes of Modernism to bear on Welsh literature at this time, that we see most strikingly Van Hamel’s incisiveness when dealing with contemporary poetry. T. H. Parry-Williams had come to national prominence after winning both the Chair and Crown at the 1912 National *Eisteddfod*, a rare feat known as the ‘double achievement’. In May 1914, after having needed ‘weeks and months to understand [the poetry] adequately,’ Van Hamel wrote to Henry about his son’s accomplishment in a passage that is worth quoting in its entirety for its perceptiveness and candour:

Tom’s work, despite its difficulty, pays golden rewards to the reader. I am not speaking of his *pryddest* (long free-metre poem) about Gerald of Wales which is attractive and clear poetry, but of the *awdl* with its plethora of deep thoughts and complex expressions. It is not the old words that bother me. If I may take

⁸ For more information on Van Hamel’s time in Ballyferriter, see the contribution by Mícheál Ó Flaithearta in this volume, as well as that by Nike Stam.

⁹ ‘Letters from A. G. van Hamel’, A36: ‘Gwlad hyfryd iawn ydyw y Werddon; a nid ydyw y “diawlaid o hen Wyddelod” mor ddrwg ac y mae eich cy-dwladwyr yn eu tybied. Eto, nid ydyw cyn hoff ohoni ac ydyw o Gymru. Y mae ammodau y gwerin yn sal iawn, yn waeth o lawer nag yng Nghymru ac am y rheswm yma nid ydyw cymmaint o foesoliad ganddynt. Fel hyn y mae eich iaith a’ch llenoriaeth chwi yn fwy llwyddianus o lawer. Namyn hyn y mae y iaith Wyddeleg yn anhawdd iawn a nis gallwn ei siarad yn gystal a’r Gymraeg. Pa fodd bynag, y mae’n sicr, nad ydyw fy Nghymraeg yn wych iawn hefyd a bydd yn rhaid i mi dreulio rhyw amser gyda chwi. Yr un beth a fedraf ei wneyd yn y fan yma ydyw darllen; ond y mae arnaf eisieu siarad Cymraeg unwaith eto!’

¹⁰ ‘Letters from A. G. van Hamel’, A39: ‘Deuaf i Ryd-ddu ddydd Mercher nesaf. [...] A ganiatewch i mi eich clywed chwi yn yr ysgol?’. Van Hamel also thanks Parry-Williams in his dissertation, which he defended in 1911. See Jaski’s contribution, ‘I am as yet incomplete’: A. G. van Hamel in his youth’, in this volume.

¹¹ ‘Letters from A. G. van Hamel’, A27: ‘Lle y mae dyddiau deifol Gorphennaf ac Awst, pan yr oeddem ni yn darllen ar y cae? Y maent wedi ffoi yn ddiadlam!’

¹² ‘Letters from A. G. van Hamel’, A27: ‘yn Gymro gwell o lawer yn awr na chyn yr arosiad fer ddiweddaf yn eich gwlad’; ‘nid iaith y Nefoedd [...] ond llafar uffernol y diawl!’

¹³ ‘Letters from A. G. van Hamel’, A42: ‘Y mae gennyh yr arddull ddiadurn a darluniadol sydd yn anhegborol mewn barddoniaeth o’r fath yma’.

¹⁴ ‘Letters from A. G. van Hamel’, A42: ‘cyfnod newydd i lenoriaeth Gymreig’. Van Hamel also wrote an article on *Yr haf* in *De Nieuwe Gids* (1912b, 197-281). It is likely that this is the article he sent to Henry.

¹⁵ ‘Letters from A. G. van Hamel’, A43: ‘nid ydyw yn iaith yr Uffern’; ‘Dywedwch wrtho ef, nad ydyw yn dweyd pethau drwg amdano!’

the liberty to express my opinion on this interesting *awdl*, this is it: Tom's genius is very philosophical, and his devices are more reasonable than sensitive. But for a reasoning man, the special thing is lucidity and perspicuity, and it is in this respect that Tom sometimes fails, especially in the second part. The *awdl* bears traces of a conflict between strict-metre harmony (*cynghanedd*) and meaning. At times, the poet sacrifices the meaning of the words to the rules of language and music. This is the greatest difficulty: to create a natural *cynghanedd* and to form his images intelligibly using the same words. In this respect Tom has not perfected his skill yet. Tell him to go forward. There is nothing in man's life as simple as the conflict of spirit and matter. The spirit in us must conquer the heavy substances and the soul's impediments.¹⁶

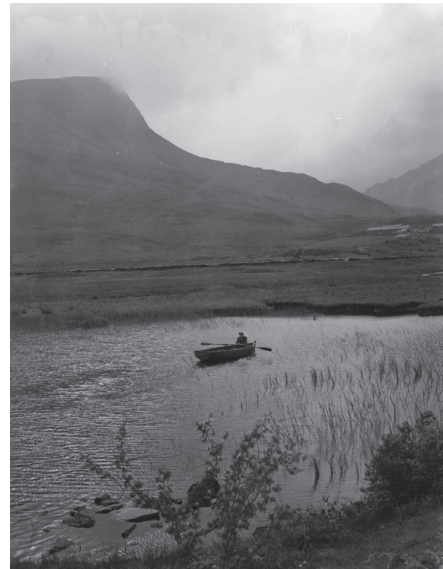
Yet, despite his reservations, Van Hamel concludes this candid appraisal of T. H. Parry-Williams' juvenilia with the prediction: 'Tom will be one of the leaders in this context, this is true!'¹⁷

'The time that lies ahead'

As the storm clouds of war gather over Europe, a note of melancholy enters Van Hamel's correspondence with Henry Parry-Williams. As early as Christmas 1912, he had written longingly of Rhyd-ddu and its community, ending with a note of anxiety about the future:

I am so fond of the old mountain cantred by Yr Wyddfa, among the fertile fields, and the nearby lake with two or three boats floating on its surface; so fond of the characters who enliven the place, Bendigeit Vran, Robert Williams of the Factory, the Stationmaster and the Policeman. When will I see them again? What will the time that lies ahead bring?¹⁸

His premonition was well-founded, and a large hiatus occurs in the correspondence during and immediately after the First World War. Only in late April 1920 do we see Van Hamel contacting Henry once more, apologising for his long silence and attributing his hesitation about writing to an anxiety about the deterioration in his Welsh.



▲ Fig. 1. A boat on the lake at Rhyd-ddu. Title: Ymweliad a Rhyd-Ddu, bro T H Parry-Williams/ A visit to Rhyd-Ddu, the area that T H Parry-Williams came from, by Geoff Charles (1909-2002) taken on 19-06-1958. Via CCo, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=42851106> (accessed on 28-3-2023).

He thanks Henry for his many letters, and in particular the photos of his family which showed that Henry's sons had survived the War (three of them were conscripted, while Tom had stood as a conscientious objector), and which symbolized to him 'the power and energy which exist in the children of the old Celts' – though he regrets that none of them were married (a fault of which he claims to be guilty himself).¹⁹ Noting that he will begin lecturing in Irish and Welsh at Leiden the following year, he concludes his letter yet again with a longing for the community members of Rhyd-ddu: 'Is Bendigeit Vran still alive? And Paul? And Robert Williams?' he asks, reassuring Henry that 'I have not forgotten anything that has some connection to Wales [...] am as fond of it as I ever was'. He signs his letter: 'Ever your old pupil, A. G. Van Hamel'.²⁰

¹⁶ 'Letters from A. G. van Hamel', A46: 'Yr oedd arnaf eisieu wythnosau a misoedd i'w ddeall yn ddigonol'; 'y mae gwaith Tom, er ei galedi, yn gwario gwobrau euraid i'r darllenwr. Nid ydwyf yn siarad yn awr am Erallt Gymro, sydd yn farddoniaeth dlos ac eglur, ond am yr awdl gyda'i amllder o feddyliau dwfn ac ymadroddion dyrys. Nid yr hen eiriau sydd yn peri anhawsderau i mi. Os caf ryddid i ddweyd fy marn am yr awdl dyddorol hwn, dyma hi. Y mae athrylith Tom yn "philosophical" iawn, ac y mae ei ddyfeisiau yn fwy o resymol nag o synwryol ("more reasonable than sensitive"). Ond i ddyn sydd yn rhesymu, y peth arbennig y mae eglurder ac amlygrwydd, ac yn y berthynas yma y mae Tom yn pallu weithiau, yn enwedig yn yr ail ran. Y mae yn yr awdl olion ymryson cynghannedd âg ystyr. Rhyw waith y mae y bardd yn aberthu ystyr yr eiriau i reolau yr iaith a'i miwsig. Dyma'r caledi mwyaf: gwneuthur cynghannedd naturiol a darlunio ei ddelfryd yn ddealladwy gyda'r un eiriau. Yn y berthynas hon nid ydyw Tom wedi perffeithio yn hollol eto. Dywedwch wrtho: yn ymlaen! Nid oes mewn bywyd dyn ddim mor arddunog âg ymryson yspryd a defnydd. Rhaid i'r yspryd sydd yn ym ni orchfygu y sylweddau trymion a rhwystrau yr enaid'.

¹⁷ 'Letters from A. G. van Hamel', A46: 'Bydd Tom yn un o'r arweinyddion yn yr ymryson yma, dyma wirionedd!'.

¹⁸ 'Letters from A. G. van Hamel', A44: 'Hoffed y mae genyf hen gantref y mynyddoedd ar ochr y Wyddfa ym mysig caeau ffrwythlawn, a'r llyn, a dau neu dri o gyhoch ar ei wyneb, yn agos; hoffed y mae genyf y cymeriadau sydd yn adfywiogi y lle: Bendigeit Vran, Robert Williams Factory, y Gorsaf-feistr a'r Hedd-geidwad! Pa bryd y caf eu gweled hwy yn ol? Beth a fydd yr amser i ddyfod yn ddwyn?'.

¹⁹ 'Letters from A. G. van Hamel', A47: 'yn arwydd am rym ac egni sydd yn trigo mewn plant yr hen Geltiaid'. Although see Jaski's contribution, "I am as yet incomplete": A. G. van Hamel in his youth', in this volume on his turbulent engagement.

²⁰ 'Letters from A. G. van Hamel', A47: 'A ydyw Bendigeit Vran yn fyw eto? A Phaul? A Robert Williams?'; 'Dyma y gwelwch nad ydwyf wedi anghofio yr un beth y sydd rhyw gysylltiad a Chymru ganddo [...] a myfi mor hoff ohoni ac y bum erioed.'; 'Fyth yr un / eich hen ddysgybl'.

Mentor and pupil

Two postcards (from Crissolo in Italy, and Rotterdam)²¹ precede a long letter written from The Hague at Christmas 1921 (the date is difficult to read, but the context implies 1921), in which Van Hamel proudly states that he is now teaching ‘the old language of heaven’ at Leiden: ‘The [Welsh] language will one day ensure its appropriate place among the languages of the world,’ he tells Henry, ‘and they will concede that it is superior to many other languages.’²² In June 1923, after a request from one of the inhabitants of Rhyd-ddu to provide a testimonial to Henry Parry-Williams on the occasion of his retirement, Van Hamel readily acknowledges his debt to his former teacher: ‘If there is any good in the Welsh education that I give to my students at Leyden University, it is the fruit of the seed sowed by him.’²³ As the critic, R. Gerallt Jones, has commented: ‘The tone and contents of [Van Hamel’s] letters shows how great was the respect that these Celtic scholars felt for the schoolmaster at Rhyd-ddu and how much influence he had on them.’²⁴ Indeed, in a subsequent letter to Henry himself, Van Hamel expresses his sentiments even more ardently:

It was hard work for you, surely, to correct the thousands of mistakes made by your thick-headed pupil, but he never once saw a hint of fatigue in the shining eyes that lit before him the narrow path of difficulties [...]. Oh, how much I should have liked to be at the school during your last week, addressing you in my poor Welsh, pathetic thing, but with a heart full of warm feeling.²⁵

The tree planted in Utrecht

Happily telling Henry that he has been made professor of Old Germanic and Celtic languages at the University of Utrecht, he declares: ‘The tree that you planted with your own hands will become fruitful.’²⁶ And he ends his letter with his heartfelt wish that Henry remain active and energetic in retirement: ‘Stay as you are today, in-

dustrious and lively, and keep dedicating all your energy to your country, your friends and your old pupils, as well as to the foreigners who wish to learn some Welsh or improve the little that they know’.²⁷

There is a bitter irony in the fact that this was to be Van Hamel’s last letter to his teacher. At Christmas 1925 Henry passed away. Van Hamel was devastated and wrote a long letter of condolence to T. H. Parry-Williams (written in English so that he might express himself more freely). It is a very moving document. In it, one can sense Van Hamel’s profound grief at the loss of his beloved mentor and friend, and his unending admiration of his qualities both as a teacher and a human being:

I feel his loss very deeply, I am thinking of him the whole day long, for I loved him and revered him with all my heart. We were friends, and I was looking forward to the day I would see him again with eager expectation. [...] He was a great teacher, and a fine pedagogue, who saw at the very first moment what I wanted, and who gave me lavishly from his store of knowledge. He never tired of the helplessness of a beginner, he never bored his pupil with the schoolmaster’s antiquated methods. For whatever I know of modern Welsh and its literature and even for a large portion of my knowledge of the older tongue, I am indebted to him. [...] He was proud to call himself *Tad holl Gymraeg y Cyfandir* (‘the father of all the Welsh on the continent’), and he was aware of his gift for *siarad gyda thramorwyr* (‘speaking with foreigners’), – but what he could was a good deal more than that. By means of his keen intelligence he imparted to them many more treasures besides a knowledge of the language. His image will be with us every day, and seeing it, we shall repeat these words representing our inmost thought: ‘He was one of the best men that ever lived. God have his soul’.²⁸

☞

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²¹ ‘Letters from A. G. van Hamel’, A48/A49.

²² ‘Letters from A. G. van Hamel’, A50: ‘hen iaith y Nefoedd’; ‘Bydd y iaith yn cael ei lle gyfaddas rhyw ddydd ymlith ieithoedd y byd; a byddant yn addef, mai yn rhagori ydyw ar lawer iawn o’r ieithoedd eraill’.

²³ ‘Letters from A. G. van Hamel’, A51: ‘Os oes dim o dda mewn addysg Gymraeg a roddaf i ym Mhrifysgol Leyden i’m efrydwyr, ffrwyth yr hâd a heuodd ef ydyw’.

²⁴ Jones 1999, 16.

²⁵ ‘Letters from A. G. van Hamel’, A52: ‘Gwaith blin yr oedd i chwi, tybed, cywiro miloedd o gamgymeriadau a wnai y dysgybl pendew, ond ni welai ef erioed un awgrym am flinder yn y llygaid dysglaer oedd yn goleuo o’i flaen ar ffordd gul yr anhawsderau. [...] Oh, ddaed y buasai genyf fod yn yr ysgol yr wythnos olaf, a’ch annerch fy hun mewn Cymraeg sâl, druan, ond gyda chalon lawn o deimladau cynhes’.

²⁶ ‘Letters from A. G. van Hamel’, A52: ‘Ffrwythloni y bydd y pren a blanasoch gyda’ch dwylaw eich hunan’.

²⁷ ‘Letters from A. G. van Hamel’, A52: ‘Aroschwch fel yr ydych heddyw: yn weithgar, bywiog, a pharhewch i neillduo eich holl egni i’ch gwlad, i’ch cyfeilliaid, i’ch hen ddysgyblion! Ac i dramorwyr y byddai arnynt eisieu ddysgu ychydig o Gymraeg, neu wellhau yr ychydig a wyddant’.

²⁸ ‘Letters from A. G. Van Hamel’, CH653.

‘Aimsir na Gaolainne’ (‘time for Irish’): A. G. van Hamel, Modern Irish and the Gaeltacht – and ogam

MÍCHEÁL Ó FLAITHEARTA

Just like for Welsh in Wales and for Icelandic in Iceland, Van Hamel spent summer periods in the Gaeltacht region of Ireland¹ in order to initially learn and later speak Modern Irish. It seems that his first trip to Baile an Fheirtéaraigh (Ballyferriter) on the Dingle peninsula in the Kerry Gaeltacht took place in 1908 with subsequent summer visits.² It may have been around this time, or as I suspect some time afterwards, perhaps in 1913, when he attended seminars at the School of Irish Learning in Dublin, that he attended Irish classes in Coláiste na Mumhan (The Munster College) in Béal Átha an Ghaorthaidh (Ballingeary) in County Cork. This college, ‘where native speakers can be trained to be effective teachers’³ and which still exists today, was set up in 1904 under the auspices of the Gaelic League, having such illustrious founders as journalist and writer Shán Ó Cuív (1875-1940).

The college attracted people that are still famous in Irish history, like playwright and politician Terence Mac Sweeney (Traolach Mac Suibhne), (1879-1920), politician Cathal Brugha (1874-1922) and activist Thomas Mac-Donagh (1878-1916). Van Hamel was not the only foreign scholar that attended the college to learn Irish: other notable foreign scholars were the Swedish folklorist Carl Wilhelm von Sydow (1878-1952), medievalist Gertrude Schoepperle (1882-1964) and linguist Joseph Vendryes (1875-1960). In his autobiography *Beatha dhuine a thoil* (1950), linguist Gearóid Ó Nualláin (1874-1942), a former student in Coláiste na Mumhan, had the following to say about van Hamel:

Duine iasachta eile a tháinig chughainn ab ea an Dochtúir Van Hamel, ach níor fhan seisean ach aon mhí amháin, is dóigh liom. Bhí sé féin agus Tadhg Ó Scanaill ana-mhór le chéile, agus is minic a théidis i dteannta a chéile ag rothaíocht chomh fada le hInnse Geimhleach sa tráthnóna.

Another foreigner who came to us [to the college] was Doctor Van Hamel, but he only stayed for one month, I think. He and Tadhg Ó Scanaill [1883-1967] were great friends, and often in the evenings they used to cycle together as far as Inse Geimhleach [Inchigeelagh]. [my translation]

Correspondence in Irish

Van Hamel must have kept up written correspondence in Modern Irish with people he became acquainted with during his trips to the Gaeltacht in Ballyferriter and Ballingeary. Logically, however, the A. G. van Hamel collection in Utrecht does not have any such letters written in Irish by him. There is, however, a letter in Irish in the National Archives in the Hague,⁴ which was sent to van Hamel and which clearly demonstrates that he corresponded and received correspondence in Modern Irish. The letter, dated 11 January 1909, is from an eighteen-year-old postman from Smerwick (in Ballyferriter) named Maurice Bowler. Bowler was a native speaker of Irish who could also speak English. Both his parents, on the other hand, could only speak Irish and could not read.⁵ Below I reproduce Bowler’s letter with a parallel English translation. For orthographic convenience I use the modern convention of marking all Irish lenited consonants with a <h> in italics, rather than with the ‘dot’ (*ponc*) employed by Bowler.⁶ I assume that the ‘Mr Best’ mentioned in the letter is Richard Irvine Best.⁷

1 The Irish-speaking areas of Ireland.

2 See Bart Jaski’s contribution ‘I am as yet incomplete’: A. G. van Hamel in his youth’ earlier in this volume; see also *Ainm.ie: An bunachar náisiúnta beathaisnéisí Gaeilge*, s.v. Van Hamel, Anton Gerard (1886-1945) in Irish (<https://www.ainm.ie/> (accessed on 16-12-2022)). Van Hamel wrote about his experiences in Ballyferriter the Amsterdam student magazine *Propria cures*, see Van Hamel 1907-8c. Unfortunately, I did not have access to this magazine.

3 So *An claidheamh solais* (‘The sword of light’, the journal of the Gaelic League) quoted in *Ainm.ie*, s.v. Ó Scanaill, Tadhg (1870-1939) in Irish (<https://www.ainm.ie/> (accessed on 16-12-2022)).

4 Maurice Bowler to VH (11-1-1909), NA, no. 297.

5 This information is available in the Irish census returns for 1901 and 1911 which are available online <http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/> (accessed on 17-12-2022).

6 I would like to thank dr. Bart Jaski of the Special Collections section of the Utrecht University Library for bringing this letter to my attention and I would like to thank the National Archives in the Hague for permission to publish the letter here.

7 For Van Hamel’s correspondence with R. I. Best, see Nike Stam’s contribution in this volume.

Baile'n-Fhirtauraig
Daingean Uí Chúise
Co Chiarraide
Eirinn
11-1-09

A Chara Ionmhuin
Fuaireas Do Chárta
Posta 7 go deimhin do chuir sé áthas
orm clos uait. Gabhaim párdún
agat i dtaobh nár scríos chúghat roime
seo. Bhéidir go dtuigean tú gur bamhlaidh
a dhearmhadas tú. Á ní ha in aon chor
Is amlaidh a chailleas do Seólad 7 ní
eadfhainn scríobh cúghat gan é. Seadh
cionnus tá tú ó shoin no ā maireann
tú i-n aon chor. Ceapas ná Cloisinn

dó

uait go deó. Cionnus ta tu ag dul cun
cinn leis an ngaolainn. Ta súil agam
go bhfuileann a dul cun cinn go maith
Ta an aimsir go hana fhliuch 7
fuar. Is dócha nar labhrais puinn
focail gaolainne o shoin no má
labarais. Ce bhí chun tú fhreagairt?
An bhfuil tu a múinead na
Gaolainne in aoncor. ba breágh
liom beith id h-eanta cun beith i
Cainnt leat. ach fáriór is mó
cisceim siúbhail eadhrann
Táim a gabháil don bpóst fós

(trí)

air ocht sgillinge sa t-seachtain
Sead ta an samhrad a teacht 7
aimsir na gaolainne a teacht. Is
doca na tiocfhair i-n (aochar) I
m-bliadhna. Ní bhfhuaireas aon
tuairisg ó Mr Best o shoin. Is doca
na cuímníon sé i-n aochar orm. Ní
docha gho bhfuil a sheoladh agat
Ma ta cuir chúgham é go scríobhfad
cúghat cupla líne chuige cunh
a chur a n.úmhail do go maiream
fos ach go háirighthe.

Tá súil agam go g-cloisfhead
uait sara fada. Má theastaighean
aon fhocal uait scríobhaig chúm 7
beidh áthas orm tú a fhreagairt
Mise do Chara buan

Dear friend,
I received your postcard
and indeed I was delighted
to hear from you. I apologize
to you that I did not write to you before
this. Perhaps you understand that it is just
that I forgot you. Ah not at all.
It is just that I lost your address and
I could not write to you without it. Well
how are you since or are you alive
at all? I thought that I would not hear

two

from you ever (again). How are you
progressing with Irish? I hope
You are getting on fine.
The weather is very wet and cold.
I suppose you have not spoken a single
word of Irish since or if you
did, who was there to answer you?
Are you teaching
Irish at all? I would love
to be with you to converse
with you. But alas there are many
footsteps between us.
I am still (working) with the post

(three)

for eight shillings a week.
Well summer is coming and
the time for Irish is coming. I
suppose you will not come (at all)
this year. I have not heard anything
from Mr Best. I suppose
he does not remember me at all. I
don't suppose you have his address?
If so, send it to me so that I will write
to you a few lines to him to
remind him that we are still
very much alive.

I hope to hear
from you before long. If you need
any word write to me and
I will be delighted to answer you.
I am your steadfast friend

Mr Maurice Bowler
Smerwick
Ballyferriter
Dingle
Co Kerry
Ireland

M. Bowler
 Baile an Fheirtéaraigh
 Dainseán na Cúige
 Co. Ciarraige
 Éirinn
 11-1-09

Δ Κάρα Ιονίου
 Ξυσίρεας Δο Κάρα
 Ρορεα 7 50 δαιμίον δο εμπε γε άσας
 σπιν ελογ καιε. Σαδαιμ παρδύν
 ΑΣΑΕ ΙΔΑΟΟΒ. ΝΑΡ ΓΕΜΟΥ ΑΙΣΑΕ ΡΑΜΕ
 γεο. Βαίειν 50 δαισεαν εμ ζυρ Βαίλαιδ
 Α δ αιρμάδαγ εμ. Δ ηι ηα ιη δον εορ
 ηγ αμλαιδ εαίλλεαγ δο Σεολαδ 7 ηι
 εαδφαίμη γεμίον εμζαε εαν ε. Σααδ
 Αιονηυ εμ εμ ο γεμ ηο α ηαιρεαση
 εμ ηη δον εορ. Εααπαγ ηα ελορημη

Τα γινε αγαμ 50 5-ελαφεαδ
 καιε γαρ Δ γαδα. Μα εαυταίσεαν
 δον φααλ καιε γεμίον εμ 7
 Βεϊδ άεαγορημ εμ Α ηρεαζαρητ

Μηρε Δο Κάρα Ιουαν
 Mr Maurice Bowler.
 Smerwick
 Ballyferriter
 Dingle
 Co Kerry
 Ireland.

▲ Fig. 1. First and last page of Bowler's letter to Van Hamel. The Hague, Nationaal Archief, 2.21.081 (Archief van J.A. van Hamel), no. 297.

The Ballyferriter notebooks

In the Van Hamel collection of the University Library there are two handwritten notebooks by Van Hamel on Modern Irish. One of them, entitled 'Notes Ballyferriter' contains eighteen pages of handwritten notes on Modern Irish. This notebook also contains Van Hamel's signature and is dated 8 August [19]08. The second notebook entitled 'Nieuwiersch II' contains twenty-five written pages, mostly only written on the righthand page, except towards the end when there is writing on both pages. These notes are mostly Irish vocabulary with Dutch translation taken from Douglas Hyde's *Cois na teineadh* ('Beside the fire', first published in 1890).⁸ Interestingly van Hamel refers to this book as 'Besides the fire'. Unless the final <s> is a typo, perhaps Van Hamel was influenced by the <s> in the Irish title (*Cois na teineadh* or *Le h-ais na teineadh*).

The Ballyferriter notebook contains Irish words and idioms with either a Dutch or an English translation. It is not always possible to tell whether these notes were jotted down from listening to people or whether they were written down in a more formal teaching environment. I believe the former to be the case from the spelling adopted by Van Hamel, as for example *naevóg* for *naomhóg* 'canoo', *mwēel* for *moill* 'delay', *píke féir* for *píce féir* 'pitchfork', or *ballabhán* for *balbhán* 'dumb person' where the epenthetic vowel is written out. The spelling *cuinn* rather than *cuing* 'yoke' is interesting as that form is found in Munster Irish. For 'grashopper' he notes the form *plibigitire*, consisting of *plib-* with the addition of *gitere* (for *geataire*), a synonym of *luachair* 'rushes'. This word is not in my vocabulary, but then again, am I not from Baile an Fheirtéaraigh. The Ó Dónaill Irish-English dictionary gives as meaning for

8 Again I would like to thank dr. Bart Jaski of the Utrecht University Library for giving me access to these notebooks.

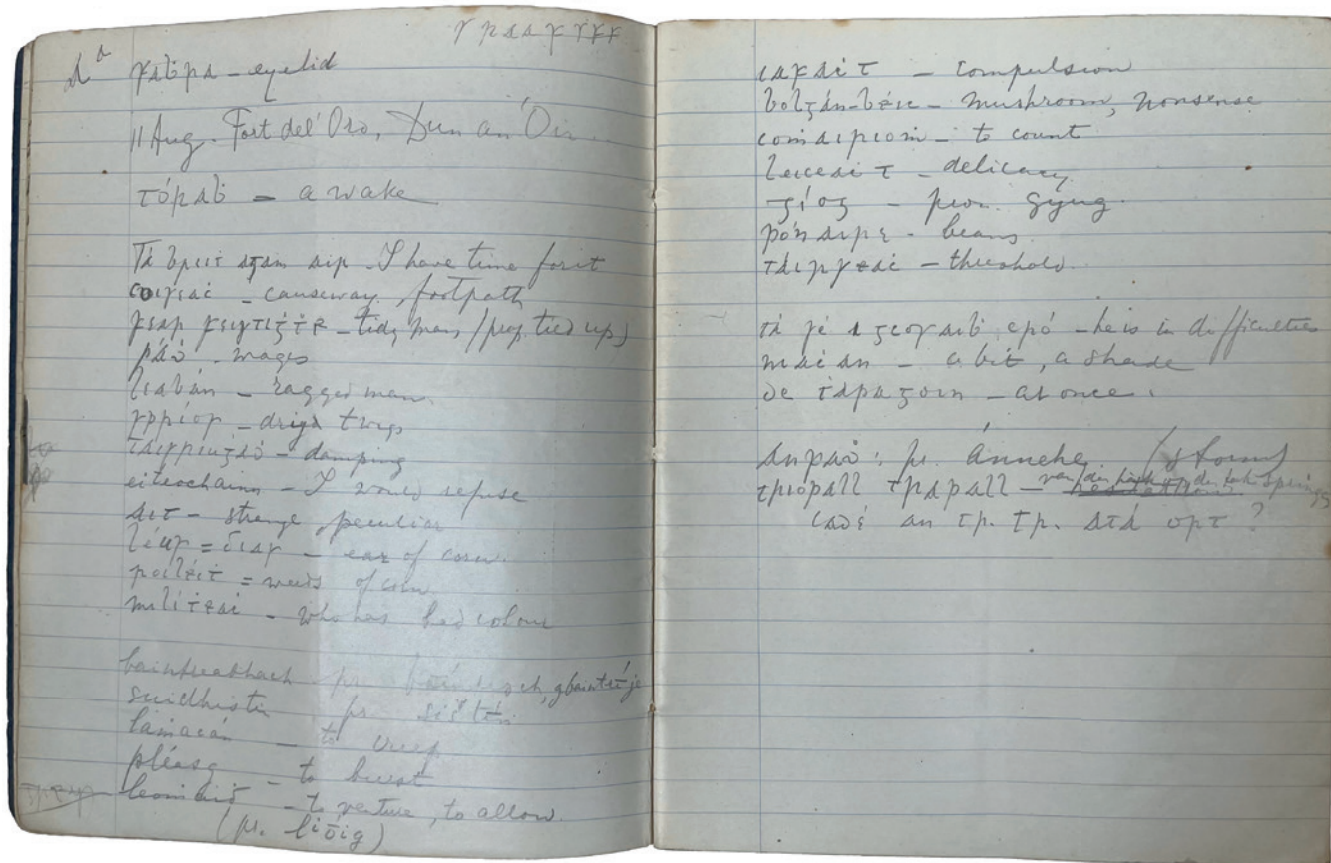
Pilib an gheataire ‘crane-fly, daddy-longlegs’.⁹ It seems to me that the word jotted down by van Hamel is a cross between *pilib an gheataire* and *pilibín* (for *pilibín*) *eitre* which means ‘grasshopper’.¹⁰

An crann géagach/De vertakte boom

In 1925, Van Hamel published a Dutch translation of the Modern Irish collection of short stories by Pádraic Ó Conaire (1882-1928) under the title *De vertakte boom*.¹¹ This is a word for word translation of Ó Conaire’s title *An crann géagach* (1919). In his brief introduction or ‘Voorrede van den vertaler’, Van Hamel states that this is the first work of Modern Irish that has appeared in Dutch translation. He mentions Peadar Ó Laoghaire’s novel *Séadna* as the beginning of modern literature in Irish before going on to mention Conradh na Gaeilge (The Gaelic League, established in 1893) and Douglas Hyde’s role in it. Indeed, *An crann géagach* was dedicated to Hyde (An Craoibhín Aoibhinn, ‘the fine little branch’) which van Hamel duly translated. He goes on to mention the success of the Gaelic League in setting up summer schools in the Gaeltacht and in the major

cities, especially Dublin, and mentions in particular the work of Pádraig Mac Piarais (Padraic Pearse). Apart from the volume by Ó Conaire that he translated, Van Hamel also mentioned the other short story collections by Ó Conaire like *Nóra Mharcais Bhig* ‘Nora of Little Marcas’ (1909), *An sgoiláire bocht* ‘The poor student’ (1914), *Seacht mbuaidh an Éirghe Amach* ‘The seven glories of the uprising’ (1918), *Síol Éabha* ‘The lineage of Eve’ (1922), *Béal an uaignis* ‘The mouth of loneliness’ (1921), *Cubhar na dtonn* ‘The foam of the waves’ (1924) as well as the novel *Deoraidheacht* ‘Exile’ (1910). Van Hamel refers to *An chéad chloch* ‘The first stone’ (1914) as *een bundel oostersche studiën* (‘a collection of Eastern studies’) and to *Tír na n-Longantas* ‘The land of wonders’ (1900) as *een romantisch sprookje* (‘a romantic fairy-tale’).¹²

So why did he choose to translate *An crann géagach* into Dutch? ‘In its simple and universal character, it lends itself particularly well to a first introduction to a literature, which is still completely foreign to us in the Netherlands’.¹³ In order to paint a sketch of the author for the Dutch reader, Van Hamel translates an account



▲ Fig. 2. Ballyferriter notebook, Utrecht, University Library, Archief Van Hamel, E 12.

⁹ See *Teanglann.ie*, s.v. *Pilib* (<https://www.teanglann.ie/ga/fgb/pilib> (accessed on 18-12-2022)).

¹⁰ See for example www.potafocal.com, s.v. *Pilibín eitre* (accessed on 18-12-2022).

¹¹ Van Hamel 1925b.

¹² Many of these works are contained in the Van Hamel collection at the Utrecht University Library and the library has digitized some of them, such as *Béal an uaignis*, *An crann géagach*, and *Seacht mbuaidh an Éirghe Amach*.

¹³ Van Hamel 1925b, v: ‘In zijn eenvoudig en algemeen menscheijk karakter leent het zich bijzonder goed voor een eerste kennismaking met een letterkunde, die ons Nederlanders nog geheel vreemd is’.

given of Ó Conaire by his friend F. R. Higgins.¹⁴ It was this same friend who penned Ó Conaire's lament in 1929.¹⁵ Among the Van Hamel collection of books at the Utrecht University Library is Van Hamel's copy of *An crann géagach* (2nd edition, 1920). A digitized copy of this volume has been made available by the University Library and it contains what I assume are some notes by Van Hamel in pencil.¹⁶

Van Hamel did not translate the Irish placenames appearing in *An crann géagach*, a wise decision. Instead he opted to give the English version of the place-name in a footnote, like Ballyvaughan for Baile Uí bhFíocháin.¹⁷ In the short story 'My little black donkey' (*M'Asal beag dubh*) he glosses the placename Cinn Mhara as 'Kenmare'. However, the English version of Cinn Mhara, presumably the coastal village in southern County Galway, is Kinvara, whereas Kenmare (in Killarney, County Kerry) has an unrelated Irish form Neidín. For the name Cill Eoghnáin in the short story 'The woman at the window' (*An bhean bhí ag an bhfuinneóg*) he gives the English form of Killonan. However, Killonan in Limerick is derived from Irish Cill Lonáin 'the church of (saint) Lonán'. For these instances, we should take into account that some English forms of Irish place-names are notoriously untransparent, even more so for non-Irish people, and Van Hamel can be forgiven these inaccuracies.

Scholarly interest in Munster Irish

In 1926, van Hamel returned to Munster Irish in print. In that year, he published the article 'De accentuatie van het Munster-Iersch' along with a brief summary in English.¹⁸ In his introduction (p. 288), he writes:

It will probably never be possible to write a comprehensive history of the Irish dialects. We must draw all our factual knowledge from the living language.¹⁹

In a footnote, he thanks informants 'who spoke Irish "from the cradle onwards" and who afterwards preserved it in a pure form'.²⁰ He goes on to thank his old instructor in Ballingearry, Tadhg Ó Scannaill 'to whom I

would like to express my thanks here for the much he has taught me. But he is not the only one, to whom I feel obliged.²¹

T. F. O'Rahilly in his *Irish dialects past and present* (1932) does not mention Van Hamel or this article, but in a brief introductory chapter entitled 'Accentuation' (pp. 83-85), before going on to discuss 'The accent in Southern Irish' (pp. 86-98), he writes the following in a footnote (p. 83, fn. 1):

The present chapter and several of those that follow are summarized from a detailed (and still unpublished) treatise on 'The Accentuation of Gaelic' which I compiled in the years 1915-1916. This fact may be worth mentioning here because one or two friends in whose hands the work remained for some time have been so interested in it as to anticipate me in giving publicity to certain of its contents.²²

Van Hamel's article is also notably absent in the otherwise thorough and definitive chapter by Seán Ua Súilleabháin on Munster Irish in *Stair na Gaeilge* (McCone 1994).

Some ogam from Ballyferriter

Finally, on the very last page of the 'Ballyferriter notes' (1908), Van Hamel includes a rough sketch and transcription of the Ballinrannig (Baile an Reannaigh) ogam stone which overlooks Smerwick Harbour in the village of Cillvickillane (Cill Mhic Uíleín) about a kilometre west of Ballyferriter.²³ According to McManus, this inscription belongs to one of the earliest in the Ogam corpus as there is no trace of vowel affection and it could thus be dated to the first half or early second half of the fifth century.²⁴ Van Hamel's transcription reads: CON-AMAQQICORBLIMAQQI...S with Van Hamel's uncertainty regarding the reading of the underlined letters, whether as BB (twice one B parallel stroke to the right of a base line) or an L (two closer together L parallel strokes to the right of the base line). In his autopsy Van Hamel has stricken through both the B and the L. Against Van Hamel's reading of the first name CONAMAQQI ('of Conmac')

¹⁴ Van Hamel 1925b, vi-viii.

¹⁵ The poem is partially reproduced in Denvir 1978, 3-4. For a biographical account of Ó Conaire in Irish, see *Ainm.ie*, s.v. Ó Conaire, Pádraic (www.ainm.ie (accessed on 2-12-2022)), and (in English) *Dictionary of Irish biography*, s. v. Ó Conaire, Pádraic (<https://www.dib.ie/biography/o-conaire-padraic-a6314> (accessed on 2-12-2022)). It is of interest in the context of this contribution that, while Ó Conaire was in Blackrock College (1898 onward), he was in the same class as T. F. O'Rahilly and Éamon de Valera. For Van Hamel and T. F. O'Rahilly, see further below. In 1935, it was Éamon de Valera as president of the executive council of Ireland (*taoiseach* after 1937) who unveiled the statue of Ó Conaire by Albert Power (1881-1945) in Eyre Square, Galway (now in the city museum). I am not aware whether Van Hamel and de Valera did ever meet. Seven years after Van Hamel's death, in 1952, de Valera would spend some months in Utrecht undergoing operations on his eyes at the Eye Clinic (now the Eye Hotel).

¹⁶ See Digital Special Collections at the Utrecht University Library: <https://objects.library.uu.nl/reader/index.php?obj=1874-379666&lan=en#page/16/32/70/163270144033426961175890228892075675492.jpg/mode/1up> (accessed on 3-03-2023).

¹⁷ Baile Uí Fhíocháin in *De vertakte boom*. This placename in County Clare is now usually written *Baile Uí Bheacháin*.

¹⁸ Van Hamel 1926a, 323-324.

¹⁹ Van Hamel 1926a, 288: 'De geschiedenis der Iersche dialecten zal wel nooit eenigszins uitvoerig geschreven kunnen worden. Wij moeten al onze feitenkennis putten uit de levende taal'.

²⁰ Van Hamel 1926a: 'die het Iersch "van de wieg af" gesproken en het daarna zuiver bewaard hebben'.

²¹ Van Hamel 1926a: 'aan wien ik er prijs op stel hier mijn dank uit te spreken voor het vele, dat hij mij geleerd heeft. Maar hij is niet de eenige, aan wien ik mij verplicht voel'.

²² See Ó Sé 1997, 191. I would like to thank dr. Brian Ó Catháin, National University of Ireland Maynooth for alerting me to this a few years ago.

²³ Macalister 1945-1949 (*CIIIC*), i, 149-150, no. 154. See Ogham in 3D – Kerry / 154. Ballinrannig VII (dias.ie) (accessed on 28-3-2022).

²⁴ McManus 1991, 93-94.

with *o* and which shows vowel affection, most modern scholars who have worked with ogam since Macalister (e.g. McManus 1991, Gippert 1978/1981) read the first name as CUNAMAQQI. Some early transcriptions (Windele 1848; Brenan 1871; Ferguson 1887) like Van Hamel also read the name with an *o*.²⁵

We can say that, while learning and speaking Modern Irish during the 'time for Irish' (*aimsir na Gaolainne*) on the shores of Smerwick Harbour (Cuan Ard na Caithne) in Ballyferriter, Van Hamel did not take his eye of the earlier periods of the Irish language.

CS

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²⁵ For all previous published transcriptions see TITUS-Ogamica 154 (uni-frankfurt.de) (accessed on 16-12-2022).

A. G. van Hamel and R. I. Best: best friends?

NIKE STAM

This article discusses various aspects of the correspondence between Anton Gerard van Hamel and Richard Irvine Best (17 January 1872 - 25 September 1959), director of the National Library of Ireland and renowned celticist. The letters paint a unique picture not only of Van Hamel's strong friendship with Best and his wife Edith Best-Oldham, but also of his thoughts on the field and the world around him. This picture is much more multifaceted than the one presented in earlier references to this correspondence. A few scholars have, in fact, previously attempted to use the letters Van Hamel wrote to Best to define his character. Interestingly, however, their interpretations are quite different: for instance, Seán Ó Lúing writes in his book *Celtic studies in Europe* that Van Hamel's letters reveal that he had a 'sunny and sympathetic nature',¹ while Pól Ó Dochertaigh, in his biography of Julius Pokorny (1887-1970), writes that Van Hamel was 'unbelievable and inappropriately smug' and that he was more 'Deutsch' than 'Dutch'.² Whatever this means, it was obviously not meant as a compliment! This goes to show that two different scholars can paint a very different picture of Van Hamel, based on the same sources.

In view of the centenary of Celtic in Utrecht, which we owe to Van Hamel's dedication to the chair of Celtic and the field of Celtic studies, it is high time for us to immerse ourselves in this correspondence, and see if we can find out more about Van Hamel's character and his friendship with Best. Do the letters reveal more about how they met each other, and how they expressed their friendship? Can we learn more about what Van Hamel thought of his colleagues, of the field of Celtic studies, and of the world in general?

The corpus

Before we can turn to these questions, we will need a description of the corpus: Van Hamel's letters to Best are held in the National Library of Ireland (NLI) in four different folders (NLI MS 11004 (7) I-IV), containing approximately 90 letters in total. Approximately, because it would seem that some of these letters have been misfiled and were not written by Van Hamel. The correspondence covers a period of 32 years, beginning



➤ Fig. 1. Impression of folder MS 11004 7 iii, Dublin, National Library of Ireland.

in February 1908 and ending in March 1940, some two months before the German invasion of the Netherlands. The material ranges from short scribbles on postcards to long letters running to several pages.³

The start

The very first letter in the collection straight away tells us how Van Hamel and Best got in touch: in that letter from February 1908, we see Van Hamel taking what is known as the 'cold approach' – being a very polite but determined student, he would like to hear from Best whether there are any opportunities for foreign students to learn Irish in Ireland:⁴

Dear Sir, I hope you kindly will forgive my boldness of addressing this letter to you; I shall be very much obliged to you, if you will have the goodness to answer my request or to pass this letter to anyone who would give me informations. I am a student of Teutonic languages and I should like to acquire also some knowledge of Celtic languages of or and [sic] literature. I did some Welsh, but my Irish, especially Old-Irish, is very insufficient. It is so difficult to study everything from books and in this country we have no

¹ Ó Lúing 2000, 32.

² Ó Dochertaigh 2003, 107, 151. See also his lemma on Ainm.ie: <https://www.ainm.ie/Bio.aspx?ID=289> (accessed on 16-1-2023).

³ For the contents of the individual folders, see Appendix 1 at the end of this article.

⁴ This letter is unfortunately not dated by year, but in the next letter in May Van Hamel tells Best that he is 'only 21', which means he is writing in May 1908, just before his 22nd birthday in July of that year (see Schneiders 2013).

Celtic teachers. Is there an Old-Irish summerclass in the School for Irish Learning, that a foreigner might follow, or, if there is not, do you know another way to supply this lack? Perhaps I could find next summer the opportunity to spend a few weeks in your country on this purpose. You will oblige me very much indeed by showing me the right way to get on, and I am most thankful to you for any trouble you kindly take on my behalf. Yours faithfully, A. G. van Hamel.⁵

While we do not have Best's reply, we can infer from Van Hamel's second letter dated to May that year that it must have been in the affirmative, given that Van Hamel writes that he has decided to attend professor Osborn Bergin's summer school.⁶ At the time, Bergin (1873-1950) was a professor at the School of Irish Learning, which had been founded in 1903 by Kuno Meyer (1858-1919).⁷

Van Hamel goes on to write that he will try to spend August in Ireland to study 'the spoken tongue'. Regarding his stay in Dublin, Van Hamel seeks additional help from Best with a problem that remains as relevant and urgent today as it was in 1908: 'As you kindly offered your help to me in your last letter, I take the liberty to ask you, whether you can give me any informations, what would be the best way to live in Dublin. I am only 21 and I do not want to spend large sums on high class hotels or boarding houses.'⁸ Van Hamel feels that he may have been a bit rash in putting such a request to such a renowned scholar, as he concludes his letter stating that 'I am sure I ought to apologise to you for my boldness, but I trust you will not take it amiss'.⁹ Van Hamel's assumption seems to have been correct, for a letter dating probably to August of that year reveals that Van Hamel received a very warm welcome at the home of Best and his wife and that he was very grateful for it:

A Chara,
As you probably do not know how hospitable your house has been to me last two days, it is *ceart* for me to tell you I can't tell you, because it was so overwhelming; as to the first part of my visit to Dublin, you know all about it. All I can do is to say: Thanks for everything, AG. van Hamel¹⁰

A lifelong friendship

It seems that this summer of 1908 formed the foundation on which the longstanding friendship between

Van Hamel and Best was built.¹¹ The vast differences that separated them at the time of these first letters, such as their difference in age (14 years) and status (Van Hamel was still a student, while Best was already assistant director of the NLI), gradually fade away over the course of their correspondence as their professional friendship develops.

This friendship manifests itself, for example, in Van Hamel's quips to Best about not writing back soon or often enough. In January 1912, for example, Van Hamel writes to Best after no letters had been exchanged for three years (as far as we can tell from the archives): 'I really was afraid you were forgetting me altogether'.¹² He explains how important Best's friendship is to him, referring to a gift he had received from him, which he regarded as 'a proof of your undiminished friendship towards me [...]'.¹³ Many similar exclamations and witticisms follow in later letters, as in the 1919 letter in which Van Hamel exclaims 'This was a quick response! You might try to imitate me!';¹⁴ in 1921, he floridly describes how Best usually begins his letters:

Did you ever start a letter without this gorgeous display of excuses of this unfortunate neglect of your correspondence, which, in the meantime, I have learned to appreciate as one of your prominent qualities [...]?¹⁵

By the end of the letter, however, he seems to worry that this opening might be misinterpreted by Best, as he concludes with 'I am struck with terror because I opened this letter with what might seem a praise of your long periods of scribal inertia. But that is altogether wrong! I regard it as a cursed sin, that should be given up altogether!'.¹⁶

Another important aspect of the friendship between Best and Van Hamel that emerges from the letters is the help Best regularly provides when Van Hamel needs to write or publish something in English. References to Best proofreading texts by Van Hamel begin in 1914, when Van Hamel sends him the first draft of an article. On both 5, 14 and 30 January, he writes to Best about it. It is clear from the last letter that Van Hamel had been somewhat overwhelmed by the amount of corrections and improvements Best had sent, and that he was concerned that this might cause the cost of printing to spiral out of control:

⁵ VH to R. I. Best (26-2-[1908]), NLI.

⁶ See also his entry on Ainm.ie: <https://www.ainm.ie/Bio.aspx?ID=122> (accessed on 16-1-2023).

⁷ Ó Lúing 2000, 29-30, and Ainm.ie: <https://www.ainm.ie/Bio.aspx?ID=164> (accessed on 16-1-2023).

⁸ VH to R. I. Best (27-5-1908), NLI.

⁹ VH to R. I. Best (27-5-1908), NLI.

¹⁰ VH to R. I. Best (27-8-1908), NLI. The letters in italics reflect Van Hamel's use of *seanchló* (the modern insular typeface).

¹¹ Celticist Eleanor Hull participated in the 1909 summer school, see Riggs 2015, 24, who also discusses her correspondence with Best.

¹² VH to R. I. Best (8-1-1912), NLI.

¹³ VH to R. I. Best (8-1-1912), NLI.

¹⁴ VH to R. I. Best (3-3-1919), NLI.

¹⁵ VH to R. I. Best (23-4-1921), NLI.

¹⁶ VH to R. I. Best (23-4-1921), NLI.

My dear Best, I find no words fit to express my thankfulness for your excellent lessons in English. Now the printer tells me that I must not continue in this way, as these hosts of corrections make the printing too expensive [...]. I must beg you, but though I do it reluctantly, that you should no longer affect to polish over my poor prattle with your refined eloquence [...]. No doubt it will be a tremendous effort for you to let pass so many violations of your mother tongue. Ever yours A.G. van Hamel.¹⁷

Best continues to proofread Van Hamel's texts throughout his career, and Van Hamel continues to work on improving his English. In a letter from 1919, for instance, we read that thanks to 'daily conversations with passing officers and soldiers',¹⁸ his English has probably gotten better, but that Best will surely still be able to find something to improve upon:

I am afraid it [Van Hamel's English] will not be able to pass your censorship unchanged. But you know I am a grateful disciple, and you have plein pouvoir.¹⁹

In 1932, Van Hamel again thanks Best profusely for the time he puts into helping out a friend:

My dear Best, when I received the proofs of my Introduction the other day, I saw how much you have been doing for me in giving my wretched English a decent aspect. [...] What would have become of it all if you had not interfered? But at the same time I fully realise the trouble I gave you. All I can say is this: I have been in your debt for so many years, and if the debt has increased, it is only the natural consequence of your usual readiness to give your friends the benefit of your own accomplishments.²⁰

Another important feature of their friendship was the exchange of books, often sent as presents, such as, for example, the celebrated edition of *Lebor na hUidre* by Best and Bergin:

Dear Best, I hear you saying: how dare you? Yes, my dear friend, there is your wonderful edition of *Lebor na hUidhre* lying before me, and I know it but too well: I never wrote you a word about it and you must have taken me for the most ungrateful of human beings and perhaps even for a brute – unless you know me better (as, after all, I think I may assume).²¹

Books were also sent to Van Hamel so that he could forward them to other celticists on the continent – a most vital role, especially during the First World War, of which Van Hamel says: 'I am very proud of my position as a neutral post-officer among the British & Continental Celtists'.²² Best, in turn, was able to inquire for Van Hamel whether books he had ordered in Ireland would ever be delivered:

My dear Best, Would you enable me to become the most grateful of human beings? I always order my Irish books from the Irish Bookshop, 45 Dawson Street, and they always send them at once. [...] Would you be so obliging as to inquire? [...] No end of thanks!²³

The strong bond between Van Hamel and Best thus comes to the fore in a number of things, such as the exchange of favours and gifts, and Van Hamel's witty reproaches to Best for his extended periods of silence.

Edith Best-Oldham

Van Hamel's letters reveal that he did not only maintain a warm friendship with Best himself, but also with Best's wife, Edith Best-Oldham (1865–1950). She was a professional musician and someone of some standing in the Gaelic League.²⁴ Van Hamel always ends his letters with his best wishes to Best and his wife. In itself, this might understandably be taken for mere courtesy, but in his letters Van Hamel also frequently recalls the music they made together during his stay at Ballyferrier (in 1908) – Van Hamel was a fine musician himself and enjoyed playing the violin. In 1912, for instance, he writes 'nor will ever pass into nothingness your wife's excellent Brahms-playing'; 'please tell Mrs. Best I can play all Brahms' and Beethoven's sonatas and concertos, so I hope next time I come to Baile Átha Cliath we will have a grand time'.²⁵ In other letters, he tells them what pieces of music he is studying and that he finds solace in playing the violin, especially in the wake of Kuno Meyer's death ('Give my best regards to your wife. Tell her I have become a famous fiddler! It keeps me up in days of affliction').²⁶ He also tells Best that his wife might find it interesting to learn that he has bought a splendid violin once owned by the alto player of the Bohemian Quartet. He made this investment because of 'the frailty of all paper values'.²⁷ This was in 1932, during the global economic crisis.

¹⁷ VH to R. I. Best (30-1-1914), NLI.

¹⁸ VH to R. I. Best (03-3-1919), NLI.

¹⁹ VH to R. I. Best (03-3-1919), NLI.

²⁰ VH to R. I. Best (02-7-1932), NLI.

²¹ VH to R. I. Best (19-12-1929), NLI. This signed copy (Best and Bergin 1929) is now UBU, Van Hamel 250, containing a brief note by Bergin and Best to Van Hamel, see Uit het Broek 2020.

²² VH to R. I. Best (09-9-1914), NLI.

²³ VH to R. I. Best (15-11-1924), NLI.

²⁴ For more on this, see, for example, her entry in the *Dictionary of Irish biography*: <https://www.dib.ie/biography/best-edith-a0633> (accessed on 30-6-2022).

²⁵ VH to R. I. Best (08-1-1912), NLI.

²⁶ VH to R. I. Best (11-11-1919), NLI.

²⁷ VH to R. I. Best (17-5-1932), NLI.



▲ Fig. 2. Photograph of a number of celticists in front of the School of Irish Learning, 1913. From left to right, starting with the top row, top left: J. H. Loyd (Seosamh Laoide, 1865-1939), Maud Joynt (c. 1868-1940), Eleanor Knott (1886-1975), R. I. Best; bottom row: A. G. van Hamel, Annie Power (1889-1963), Holger Pedersen (1867-1953), William O'Brien (1881-1968) and Tadhg Ó Donnchadha (1874-1949). Permission to print from the National Library of Ireland (MS 49,860/8), see <https://catalogue.nli.ie/Record/vtlso00647830> (accessed on 26-3-2023).³¹

There also seem to be a number of signs that Van Hamel kept a separate correspondence with Edith Best. For example, in 1920, when it was announced that Best would become professor at the NLI, Van Hamel wrote: 'I was but too glad when I heard from your wife that at last you will be granted an honour, which you have deserved already for years'.²⁸ In 1931, he seems to have missed a visit by Best to the Netherlands, but was reassured by Edith Best: 'It was a very great disappointment to me to miss your visit in Holland. But I was glad to hear from your wife that you will come back together'.²⁹ Although there are no letters from Van Hamel in the personal archives of Edith Oldham-Best, Richard Best's collection does contain a postcard addressed to Edith Best, written in Dublin by Van Hamel when the couple was away in August 1930:

Dear Mrs. Best, Many thanks for your card. I am afraid you are having very boisterous weather, it is even usually cold at Dublin to-day. But this matters little if the sea-air has the much desired effect upon your husband's health. It will be good for yourself, too. [...] Fortunately I have got on very well with my Irish texts, I hope to finish copying the last Nennius-recension to-morrow, and shall have time to do something else still. My visit to Eóin Mac Néill had very satisfactory results; he seems willing to take the Nennius for the Manuscripts Commission. Dublin is full of Celtic scholars now. The young American couple, whose name I forget, is charming; I gave her my programme for the Congress. Then there is Dr. Hull with whom I had corresponded a good deal. I am also seeing much of Mr. Weenink and Mrs. Van Stockum. Thus nothing fails me except you and sunshine; fortunately, I have the very pleasant recollections of the week before you went away. I must be leaving on the 22nd. With my best regards to you both, AGvanHamel.³⁰

It is striking to see Van Hamel discussing Dublin Celtic studies with Edith Best as if with a true insider. While the letter would probably also have been read by Richard Best, it still seems to indicate that Edith Best was very much involved in her husband's affairs and was well informed of their particulars.

Although Edith Best's archive contains no written letters from Van Hamel, it does contain something else: a photograph depicting Van Hamel standing alongside a number of other celticists at the School of Irish Learning in 1913. Curiously, this photograph features a pram in the edge of the frame, which seems to have caused the endeared look on Van Hamel's face.

²⁸ VH to R. I. Best (06-6-1920), NLI. The letter is very enjoyable overall and cites a nickname for Best as Kuno Meyer's 'infixd pronoun, now an analytic personal pronoun of a most independent and distinguished position among Celtic scholars'.

²⁹ VH to R. I. Best (20-4-1931), NLI.

³⁰ VH to R. I. Best (13-8-1930), NLI. The individuals mentioned in this letter are the following: Eóin Mac Néill (1867-1945), <https://www.ainm.ie/Bio.aspx?ID=452> (accessed on 26-3-2023); Vernam Hull (1895-1976), <https://www.ainm.ie/Bio.aspx?ID=627> (accessed on 26-3-2023); I. R. A. W. Weenink (see Gerritsen 2019, 109-110); Hilda van Stockum appears to be related to Van Hamel on his uncle Antonius Gerardus van Hamel's side, who was married to Clara Maria van Stockum. Her brother Abraham van Stockum (1864-1953) was Hilda's father.

³¹ J. H. Loyd: <https://www.ainm.ie/Bio.aspx?ID=25> (accessed on 16-1-2023). Maud Joynt: <https://www.ainm.ie/Bio.aspx?ID=261> (accessed on 16-1-2023); Eleanor Knott: <https://www.ainm.ie/Bio.aspx?ID=146> (accessed on 16-1-2023); Annie Power: <https://www.dib.ie/biography/power-ann-nancy-wyse-a7459> (accessed on 16-1-2023); Holger Pedersen: <https://www.ainm.ie/Bio.aspx?ID=671> (accessed on 16-1-2023).

The fact that we cannot find any letters by Van Hamel in her archives does not necessarily mean that they are all gone. Ó Lúing, for example, found a brief card from Van Hamel to Mrs. Best in Kuno Meyer's archives in the NLI,³² so further investigations of the archives of these celticists will certainly be worthwhile.

Van Hamel and his fellow celticists (m/f)

Van Hamel's letters tell us much about his fond friendship with Best, but, of course, the letters also deal with a great many other things. For instance, we learn about Van Hamel's thoughts on Celtic studies in general and, in particular, on his colleagues within the field.³³ Alongside Van Hamel's many famous male colleagues, such as Rudolf Thurneysen (1857-1940),³⁴ Kuno Meyer, and Osborn Bergin, we also encounter female colleagues and students of his who have been somewhat neglected in the historiography of the period. Academia was not altogether welcoming to women at the time when these letters were written (between 1908-1940). That said, there are several references to and endorsements of female scholars and students in Van Hamel's letters. Alice Stopford Green (1847-1929), a prominent Irish historian and nationalist, is twice mentioned briefly in his letters.³⁵ Two female students, a Miss Stassen and an unnamed student, are praised by Van Hamel as 'one of our most brilliant students' and 'a very nice young woman' respectively:

May I introduce you to my pupil Miss Stassen. She is coming to Ireland to continue her Irish studies and to prepare a thesis. She has been a long time in West-Cork and speaks some Irish; at the same time she is able to read early Irish texts. [...] She is a good linguist and was one of our most brilliant students.³⁶

Dear Best, A young lady, student of the University of Amsterdam, is writing a dissertation on the Anglo-Irish Drama, especially W.B. Yeats. I advised her to go to Dublin next summer, to work in the Library; She might join the Summer Course at the same time. [...] She would be very glad, if she could get acquainted with a young lady at Dublin, with whom she could correspond occasionally, in order to get information on points about which she cannot ascertain over here (small periodicals etc.) She is a very nice young woman, and I am sure she would not be indiscreet, and do anything she could in return.³⁷

This unnamed student must be Rebecca Pauline Christine Brugsma (1889-1968), whose dissertation *The beginnings of the Irish revival* appeared in 1933;³⁸ Miss Stassen remains as yet unknown.³⁹ Dr. Caroline Henriette de Jonge (1886-1972), one of the first female museum directors in the Netherlands, is mentioned because she would like to collaborate on an exhibition of early Christian art at the Centraal Museum Utrecht.⁴⁰ Irish celticist Eleanor Knott is also mentioned because she proofread parts of Van Hamel's work.⁴¹ While he was not unreservedly enthusiastic about her many corrections and additions, he had to admit that some of them had been helpful after all.⁴² It is also worth mentioning that Maartje Draak features twice in his letters: first when Van Hamel informs Best that she will visit Dublin in January 1938,⁴³ and then when he wrote to Best that he was happy that the visit had gone so well and that Best had appreciated her so much:

It was a great pleasure to me that you liked Miss Draak. I seldom had such a promising pupil, but even

32 Ó Lúing 1991, 195, referring to NLI, MS 11.002. The correspondence deals with Kuno Meyer's health, after he had been involved in a serious accident in America.

33 In particular, Van Hamel's close engagement with Kuno Meyer and his family emerges from the letters and really merits an article of its own. Van Hamel's letters offer a detailed account of Meyer's radicalisation as a German nationalist and the strain this put on their friendship and the relations between Meyer and other celticists. For instance, Van Hamel writes that Holger Pedersen refused to continue working with Kuno Meyer and that he was surprised by this impassioned statement from an otherwise gentle scholar, 'who used to rehearse his lectures in the Blackrock tram!' – VH to R. I. Best (09-9-1914), NLI.

34 See Ainm.ie: <https://www.ainm.ie/Bio.aspx?ID=476> (accessed on 16-1-2023).

35 For more on this, see her entry in the Dictionary of Irish biography: <https://www.dib.ie/biography/green-alice-sophia-amelia-stopford-a3602> (accessed on 30-6-2022). VH to R. I. Best (07-10-1914), NLI (about her cook in Berlin, with whom she was no longer able to get in touch) and VH to R. I. Best (27-8-1919), NLI (referring to a visit of hers to Dublin).

36 VH to R. I. Best (20-4-1931), NLI.

37 VH to R. I. Best (24-10-1926), NLI.

38 See also Theo D'haen 2013, 76. In her dissertation, she mentions Van Hamel: <https://www.delpher.nl/nl/boeken/view?coll=boeken&identifier=MMKB05:000033922:00009> (accessed on 14-1-2023).

39 Miss Stassen is also mentioned in VH's letters to A. M. E. Draak (23-11-1940, 8-12-1940 and 17-4-1942), UBU, Archief Draak, C 4. See also note 54 below. Many thanks to Bart Jaski for supplying these references.

40 VH to R. I. Best (28-10-1938), NLI: 'P.S. Before long you will have the visit of Miss Dr. De Jonge, who asked me for an introduction to you. She is assistant-director of the Municipal Museum in Utrecht. She is coming to see Dr. Mahr about the possibility of having a loan of certain objects for an exhibition of early Christian art she is preparing here'. See also her entry in the *Vrouwenlexicon* ('Women's lexicon'): <http://resources.huylgens.knaw.nl/vrouwenlexicon/lemmata/data/Jonge> (accessed on 14-1-2023).

41 More on her work may be found in the forthcoming publication *Essays in memory of Eleanor Knott*, ed. Christina Cleary, Chantal Kobel and Micheál Hoyne, as well as in Mac Cárthaigh 2005.

42 VH to R. I. Best (04-9-1921), NLI: 'The three copies of Thurneysen's book arrived only last week, and I forwarded them at once to the addresses you gave me, so it is not my fault that Bergin, Miss Knott and the School had to defer satisfying their appetites for so many months'; VH to R. I. Best (01-3-1940), NLI: 'Here then at last are the corrected proofs of my edition, which has greatly profited from Miss Knott's criticism. I add a note to Miss Knott together with a list, where she will find a reply to each of her suggestions. From it she will see that in most instances I feel bound to admit that she was right, whereas in a smaller number of cases, to my mind, the change suggested would not mean an improvement'. See also Eleanor Knott's entry in the *Dictionary of Irish biography*: <https://www.dib.ie/biography/knott-philippa-marie-eleanor-a4599> (accessed on 1-6-2022) and Ranke de Vries' contribution in this volume.

43 VH to R. I. Best (26-12-1937), NLI, see also Ranke de Vries' contribution in this volume and, of course, Gerritsen 2019.

I myself was surprised when I saw what she had been doing during her stay in Dublin. She is becoming a great worker and will no doubt do something useful in the field of Irish studies. At the same time she is so nice and womanly.⁴⁴

Van Hamel's world

Apart from Van Hamel's reflections on his friendship with Best, the field of Celtic studies and his (female) colleagues and students, his letters also reveal how deeply concerned Van Hamel was about political developments and give us a glimpse of daily life in troubled times. During the First World War, for example, we read about the arrival of Belgian refugees in the Netherlands and about Germans being sent to the Netherlands to spread 'the truth' about the war in trams.⁴⁵ It is especially poignant to read how, in October 1914, Van Hamel already believed that 'a decision at the front must be approaching', and that while working as a university lecturer in Bonn, he taught mainly women and a few men who had been sent back injured from the front.⁴⁶ The labels, found on many envelopes, indicating that the letters had been checked by censors, are also a grim reminder of the hard times.



▲ Fig. 3. Envelope of a letter from Van Hamel to R. I. Best, 29 May 1915, with label indicating that the letter was opened by British (wartime) censors. Dublin, National Library, Ms. MS11004 7 ii.

In December 1918, Van Hamel writes that 'The dragon is dead and will never be revived',⁴⁷ but there is little time to savour this, for the 'Irish Question' now occupies the frontpages. As a result, interest in Celtic studies rises, especially, he writes, among Roman Catholics.⁴⁸ The 1920s and 1930s were also, of course, a period of great poverty in Europe, and Van Hamel often refers to this, as well as to the, in his view, frightening growth of fascism. In December 1937, he writes the following to Best:

It is as you say, for us, who are of the 'older generation', little is left to hope for in a world that is running fast towards perdition. The principles we used to believe in were not built on granite but on drifting sand.⁴⁹

With this letter, written in 1937, we are nearing the end of the correspondence between Best and Van Hamel. For it was crudely interrupted by the German invasion of the Netherlands in May 1940. Van Hamel's final letter to Best dates from two months before this event. In it, Van Hamel writes that he would like to say more about the political situation, but that he will not risk endangering the letter:

There is a strong temptation to write things of a more general character, but I must not endanger the fate of this message by yielding to it. I must write a long letter to you some day under separate cover, and I am sure I shall do it. In the meantime I hope both you and your wife are doing splendidly. Yours as always, AGvanHamel.⁵⁰

He had already expressed his concerns about the political situation in Europe in December 1938, when he wrote:

I see 1939 approaching with a heavy heart. Fate is marching on, and for soldiertrodden Europe there seems to be but one solution. Let us all be prepared and remember the great good we have had in friendship and *caínchomrac*.⁵¹

In these final letters, Van Hamel's concerns about the fate of Europe are almost tangible, and these worries likely fuelled the often melancholy reflections and fond recollections of his friendship with Best which he brings up in his writings. Take, for example, this letter from October 1938, in which he thanks Best for his help in proofreading his edition of the *Immrama*:

⁴⁴ VH to R. I. Best (28-10-1938), NLI. Part of this quote is also found in Gerritsen's biography of Draak, Gerritsen 2019, 113. See also her entry in the *Vrouwenlexicon* ('Women's lexicon'): <http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/vrouwenlexicon/lemmata/data/draak> (accessed on 1-6-2022). See also VH's letters to A. M. E. Draak (15-1-1937 and 19-3-1938), UBU, Archief Draak, C 4.

⁴⁵ VH to R. I. Best ([26]-8-1914), NLI, and VH to R. I. Best (26-11-1914), NLI.

⁴⁶ VH to R. I. Best (09-4-1915), NLI: 'My audience will consist of 60 ladies and 6 gentlemen, the latter number being rapidly increasing by one-legged or blind wretches turning up'. Van Hamel's short-lived professorship in Bonn and his escape from German conscription reads almost like an adventure novel; for more on this see Bart Jaski's contribution in this volume: "That mad ambition of mine": A. G. van Hamel in Bonn during the First World War'.

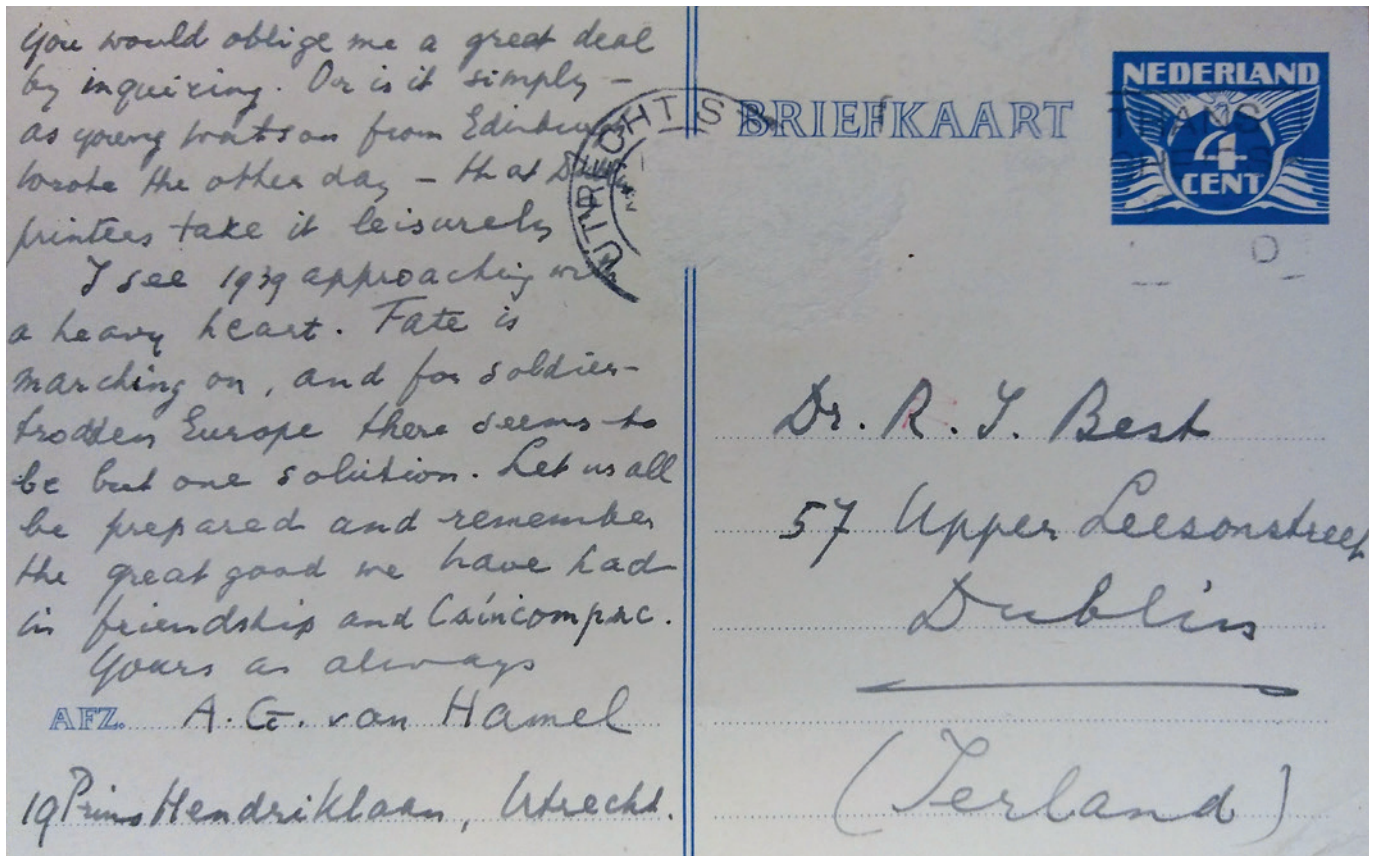
⁴⁷ VH to R. I. Best (31-12-1918), NLI.

⁴⁸ VH to R. I. Best (23-4-1921 and 15-2-1924), NLI.

⁴⁹ VH to R. I. Best (26-12-1937), NLI.

⁵⁰ VH to R. I. Best (01-3-1940), NLI.

⁵¹ VH to R. I. Best (29-12-1938), NLI. See eDIL s.v. *caínchomrac* or dil.ie/7795 (accessed on 26-3-2023), the Irish word for 'peace'.



▲ Fig. 4. Van Hamel writes the Irish word *caínchomrac* in the old script (*seanchló*). Dublin, National Library, Ms. MS11004 7 iv.

What you have done once more to make the book valuable I hardly can say. Nor need I say it, you know my feelings well enough. In my life I have had but a very few friends like you, and what I have regretted most is that meetings have always been so rare. This regret is getting stronger ~~withiñ~~ now that we are older and know less of the duration of our common future on this globe.⁵²

Here we can see Van Hamel describing his friendship with Best as one of the most singular friendships of his life, in spite of the fact that the two were rarely able to meet. It is a great pity that we only ever get to see one side of their friendship in these letters – we only have Van Hamel’s letters, carefully preserved by Best in his archives.

⁵² VH to R. I. Best (28-10-1938), NLI. See also his letter one year previously, VH to R. I. Best (26-12-1937): ‘I usually refrain from realising these appalling possibilities and content myself with thinking of what is still good and noble around us. We still have our dear friends, who share our reminiscence of a better past, and nobody can forbid us to hope everything for their good. What I hope for you is a bright year in your home, in the company of your dear wife, and success and satisfaction in completing the great work that has required so much of your exertions these last years. And all this with ‘old age’ not resting too heavily upon you, – as there is every reason to believe it does. Some leisure, besides, and – to bring in myself – that we may have an opportunity to shake hands once again and to exchange words of friendship and mutual interest’.

⁵³ For more on this, see (in Dutch): <https://www.uu.nl/nieuws/collectie-draak-geschenken-aan-de-universiteitsbibliotheek-utrecht> (accessed on 15-6-2022).

⁵⁴ The collection also contains a letter from Eleanor Knott to Van Hamel that she sent along with her ‘notes and suggestions’ for Van Hamel’s edition of *Imram curaig Mair Dúin*; for more on this, see Ranke de Vries’ contribution in this volume. It also contains a letter to miss Stassen, who was already mentioned by Van Hamel in his letter to Best (20-4-1931), VH to Stassen (12-4-1931), UBU, Archief van Hamel, G 3L (gifted to Maartje Draak by Doris Edel in 1981).

too, contains postcards (e.g. postcards depicting Irish manuscripts from the NLI) and letters, and these letters are again labelled as having been ‘opened by the censor’, though now they are censors of a different war and a different country.

The tone of the letters is similar to Van Hamel’s: they include practical questions and comments on books to be published, and news relating to their field of studies is shared (such as the establishment of the School of Celtic Studies at DIAS!):

We are all excited about the new Institute or Scoil Leighean Cheiltigh, the Bill for which is shortly to be read for the second time in the Dáil. [...] There are to be “senior Professors”, a governing Board & a Director. Who? But more of this later on, when the Instituid [sic] Ard-Leighinn, which comprises a School of Theoretical Physics, has taken shape.⁵⁵

There are also somewhat depressing reflections on the state of Europe:

With the continent in such a state of unrest, and war clouds continually appearing on the horizons, it is not easy to settle down to serious study. Our Teutonic cousins are fantastically intolerant of criticism & seem to expend their energy on solemn warnings, to which Italy also provides a vociferous accompaniment. A plague on both their dictators!⁵⁶

Let no one deceive himself that this war will usher in a golden age of peace & justice. So long as men trade there will be war. Trade is the cause of every war – the acquisition of wealth, which means dominion [...] When it is realized that “war” does not pay, it will cease. But my dear Van Hamel, that day is far off.⁵⁷

Another interesting reminiscence of Best is that of the 1916 Easter Rising in the same letter:

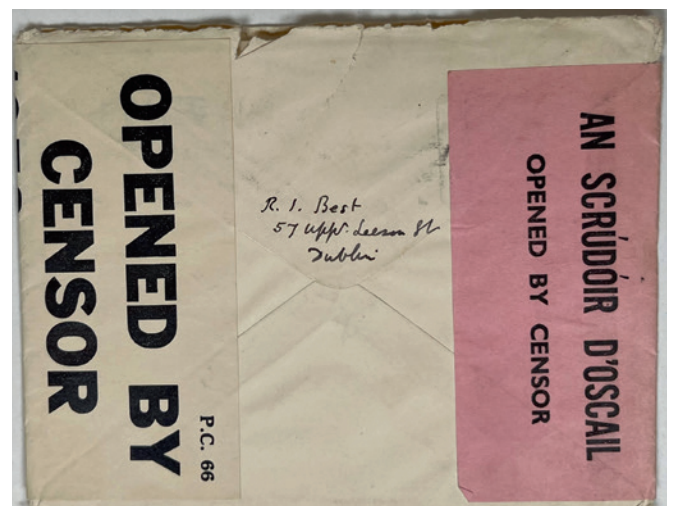
Easter is passing over without incident of any sort. It does not seem 24 years since I sat in this room working quietly at LU [*Lebor na hUidre*], on that memorable Easter Monday, unaware that the sounds of firing nearby were to change the history of this country. How time is flying! What seems to me a thing of yesterday is a life-time ago to the stalwarts of today: those who are walking in procession today, to visit the graves of those who gave their lives pro patria then – some of them personally known to me. It must ever be so.⁵⁸

And there are, of course, references to their friendship:

My dear Van Hamel, It was a real pleasure to get your letter, so friendly and evocative of those good old days that are now memories with which the wisest of us, at least, sweeten their declining years. We are both rejoiced at the prospect of seeing you this summer, in fact within a few weeks. So I will reserve all news until you are here in person.⁵⁹

My dear Van Hamel, dear & kind friend. As the solemn festival approaches, one’s thoughts go out to absent friends, & ours have been much with you of late.⁶⁰

Regrettably, we catch only a glimpse of Best’s feelings, thoughts and musings on his friendship with Van Hamel, but little though it is, it is more than we thought we had! The last letter Best wrote to Van Hamel, a postcard dated April 1940, appears to have gone unanswered.⁶¹ Best sent it along with the final proofs of Van Hamel’s edition of the *Immrama*, which would eventually be published in 1941. The archives fail to reveal whether Van Hamel was able to communicate with Best about this publication after May 1940. Just when international communications were opening up again, after the liberation of the Netherlands, Van Hamel would pass away unexpectedly in November 1945. He left behind a brokenhearted Maartje Draak, who wrote to Seamus Delargy that she had become ‘fatherless’ and had lost a teacher and mentor.⁶²



▲ Fig. 5. A letter from R. I. Best to Van Hamel (25 March 1940), also opened by a censor (scrúdóir). Utrecht, University Library, Archief Van Hamel, G 3A.

55 R. I. Best to VH (25-3-1940), UBU, Archief Van Hamel, G 3A.

56 R. I. Best to VH (19-12-1938), UBU, Archief Van Hamel, G 3A.

57 R. I. Best to VH (25-3-1940), UBU, Archief Van Hamel, G 3A.

58 R. I. Best to VH (25-3-1940), UBU, Archief Van Hamel, G 3A.

59 R. I. Best to VH (15-6-1936), UBU, Archief Van Hamel, G 3A.

60 R. I. Best to VH (19-12-1938), UBU, Archief Van Hamel, G 3A.

61 For this letter, see Ranke de Vries’ contribution in this volume.

62 Gerritsen 2019, 136; see Draak 1947 for her in memoriam of Van Hamel.

Judging from the letters Van Hamel wrote to his good friend Best, we can say that Van Hamel was both a teacher and mentor who could be much more troubled than the 'sunny and sympathetic' person Ó Lúing perceived him to be, as well as someone who was much warmer and more compassionate than the 'inappropriately smug', 'Deutsche' Van Hamel that Ó Dochertaigh extracted from the letters. Like any of us, Van Hamel was a multifaceted

and multi-layered individual, someone who stood at the centre of his field of studies and thought deeply about the world, and he deserves to be studied in that way. It is therefore fitting that we can now, as we celebrate the centenary of Celtic in Utrecht, meet him in his letters: as a friend, violinist, scholar, mentor, and individual.



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Appendix 1 – Contents of the Van Hamel - Best folders in the NLI

MS11004 7 i

- 1909-01-08
- 1912-01-08
- 1912-04-26
- 1913-03-17
- 1913-06-10
- 1913-07-20
- 1914-01-05
- 1914-03-05
- 1914-07-17
- 1914-08-26
- 1914-09-07
- 1914-09-25
- 1914-10-07
- 1914-11-26

MS11004 7 ii

- 1908-08-27
- 1915-01-05
- 1915-04-09
- 1915-05-29
- 1915-06-05
- 1915-07-10
- 1915-08-18
- 1915-10-19
- 1915-12-21
- 1916-02-18
- 1916-04-07
- 1916-06-18
- 1916-10-25
- 1917-04-02
- 1918-01-30
- 1918-12-31
- 1919-03-03
- 1919-08-27
- 1919-10-18
- 1919-11-11
- 1919-12-23

MS 11004 7 iii

- 1920-06-06
- 1920-07-04
- 1920-08-09
- 1920-09-10
- 1920-09-22
- 1920-10-17
- 1920-11-24
- 1921-04-23
- 1921-08-05
- 1921-09-04
- 1921-12-09
- 1922-05-20
- 1923-12-20
- 1924-01-27
- 1924-02-15
- 1924-06-26
- 1924-07-12
- 1924-11-15
- 1925-10-02
- 1926-06-25
- 1926-07-12
- 1926-08-12
- 1926-09-03
- 1926-10-29
- 1927-06-09
- 1928-07-27

MS 11004 7 iv

- 1908-02-26
- 1908-05-24
- 1913-08-22
- 1913-09-05
- 1913-10-02
- 1913-12-19
- 1914-01-09
- 1914-01-30
- 1914-09-09
- 1914-10-24
- 1914-11-20
- 1914-12-08
- 1915-10-19
- 1915-12-21
- 1920-07-24
- 1929-12-19
- 1930-06-20
- 1930-07-06
- 1930-07-19
- 1930-08-13
- 1931-04-09
- 1931-04-20
- 1931-07-08
- 1931-11-23
- 1932-05-17
- 1932-05-21
- 1932-07-02
- 1936-12-24
- 1937-12-26
- 1938-10-28
- 1938-12-29
- 1940-03-01
- NO YEAR-08-02

A. G. van Hamel and grammars of the Celtic languages

AARON GRIFFITH

While I have no hard numbers to support the statement, Van Hamel appears to be best-known among celticists today for his textual editions, which are still frequently cited.¹ An examination of his published work (see the bibliography at the end of this volume) also shows that he tended more toward the literary than the linguistic. For example, his *Inleiding tot de Keltische taal- en letterkunde* ('Introduction to Celtic linguistics and literature', 1917) contains a general introduction and one chapter on the Celtic languages beside six chapters covering Irish and Welsh literature.² This would seem to suggest that literary aspects of Celtic studies lay somewhat nearer to his heart than linguistic ones. Nonetheless, it is clear that Van Hamel had an abiding interest in the Celtic languages and specifically in their inner workings, i.e. their grammar. This chapter therefore seeks to illuminate this interest and work.

Van Hamel became professor in the Old Germanic languages and literature in Utrecht in 1923, and later that year Celtic was added to his tasks,³ and he continuously published on the subject. His 1926 contribution *De accentuatie van het Munster-Iersch* ('The accentuation of Munster Irish') shows his particular interest in quite detailed linguistic examination of, in this case, Modern Irish.⁴ Information such as this can be gleaned by anyone interested in it via scouring his published bibliographies. Here, I would like to focus rather on sources that are harder to come by: personal papers now in the Archief Van Hamel in Utrecht University Library.

The archive contains quite diverse materials, which is expected from a scholar with interests as broad as Van Hamel's. Many items are notes on articles he read (fig. 1).

This photo shows Van Hamel's notes on two articles he was reading from *Revue celtique*, here with clear bibliographic references. This is not always so, however.

We can see a mixed case in one particular notebook that contains excerpts and summaries of a number of articles and books on Old Irish language and linguistics. The notebook is labeled 'Excerpten (Iersch): Vendryes, Strachan etc.' and begins with 'Oudiers Excerpt Vendryes'. Though there is no further indication of the text, it is clearly referring to Joseph Vendryes' *Grammaire du Vieil-Irlandais* from 1908, as the marginal numbering of Van Hamel corresponds to the paragraph numbers of Vendryes' grammar.⁵

Continuing in the same fashion, Van Hamel then switches to notes on a number of articles by John Strachan, this time identified by title and author. Though he does not give the publication, it is clear that Van Hamel had four volumes of the *Transactions of the Philological Society* in front of him, as he has notes on Strachan one after another.⁶ The last item in the notebook changes subject entirely, however, as it is labeled "Incipit Cath Ruis na Ríg LL 171"⁷ and consists of four pages of manuscript abbreviations, most of which are ones commonly found in medieval Irish manuscripts.

While this notebook focussed mostly on detailed notes on the Old Irish language and linguistics, many other items in the archive rather seem to collect factoids and observations that Van Hamel found interesting, such as a list of Pictish names with correspondences in Welsh (fig. 2).

Here, the note is not a summary of an article, but rather a few facts on a topic of linguistics that caught Van Hamel's eye. The article from which the data was taken is indeed indicated at the top of the page as Anwyl, with a further reference to R. A. S. Macalister's study of Tara, which contains a short reference to the same.⁸ This type of note is quite common among the materials in Van Hamel's archives, and scanning through the material in the archive gives a good sense of what Van Hamel found interesting. Among the linguistic topics, in addition to

¹ I would like to thank the Stichting A. G. van Hamel voor Keltische Studies for asking me write this piece, Nike Stam for her persistence and patience in motivating me, and Bart Jaski for considerable help navigating Van Hamel's work.

² Van Hamel 1917a.

³ See also the contribution "That mad ambition of mine: A. G. van Hamel in Bonn during the First World War" by Bart Jaski in this volume.

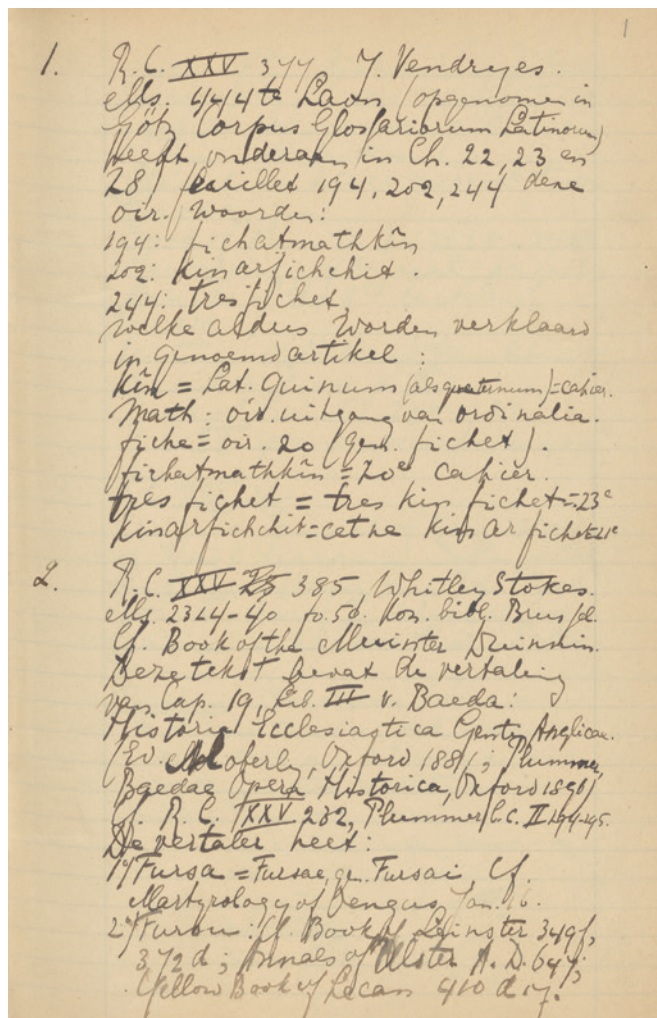
⁴ Van Hamel 1926a. See also the contribution by Mícheál Ó Flaithearta in this volume.

⁵ UBU, Archief Van Hamel, A 29; Vendryes 1908.

⁶ Strachan 1891-1894, 1895-1898, 1899-1902a, 1899-1902b, 1903-1906. The bibliographic references for early volumes of the *Transactions of the Philological Society* are exceedingly imprecise. There are no volume numbers in the printed volumes, each of which covers multiple years. Further, while the publisher's website does give volume numbers, it is missing a number of Strachan's articles from its records. I have therefore taken the rather drastic step of not giving volume numbers at all, since they are effectively a fiction. I simply give the year range for the printed volumes.

⁷ This is referring to the fact that the Book of Leinster version of the tale is found starting on folio 171.

⁸ Anwyl 1907, 139; Macalister 1931, 301.



▲ Fig. 1. Utrecht, University Library, Archief Van Hamel, A 3, page 1: Notes on Vendryes 1904 and Stokes 1904.

the Old Irish grammar articles and Pictish names with Welsh correspondences just mentioned, one also finds notes on English words of Celtic origin (UBU, Archief Van Hamel, A 3), the influence of Celtic on French (A 3), the relationship of Celtic to other languages (A 4), a glossary of Celtic place names and theonyms found in various sources (A 4), two collections of notes on the Welsh language and word formation (A 22) and Welsh lexicography and dialects (A 23), notes on the phonology of Breton and French (A 34), and various notes on Gaulish (C 13).

In what follows, I would like to focus on two items in particular which showcase Van Hamel's interest in Celtic grammars and stand out among the materials in the archive for their considerable length and depth. One of these is a detailed study of Stewart's *Elements of Gaelic grammar* from 1801. The second of these is

noted as *Radices linguae Hibernicae* (Sources (lit. roots) of the Irish language) in the archive catalogue. We can start with the first.

Working with *Elements of Gaelic grammar*

Rev. dr. Alexander Stewart was minister at Moulin, Perthshire, Scotland in the years around 1800 and while there he wrote his grammar of Scottish Gaelic. The book was reprinted four times, with the latest being the fifth edition of 1901. The Utrecht University library has the first edition in its collection, but is not clear if this was the edition that Van Hamel used for his notes.⁹ What is unusual about his notes is their extent. There is no other work of scholarship so extensively documented in the archive. Two separate notebooks (A 10 and A 27), labeled on the outside cover with 'Gaelic grammar I' and 'Gaelic grammar II', contain 105 pp. and 60 pp., respectively, devoted to the contents of Stewart's work. Van Hamel's notes follow the book closely, but not exactly, and they provide a Dutch summary, though not generally a translation, of the work.

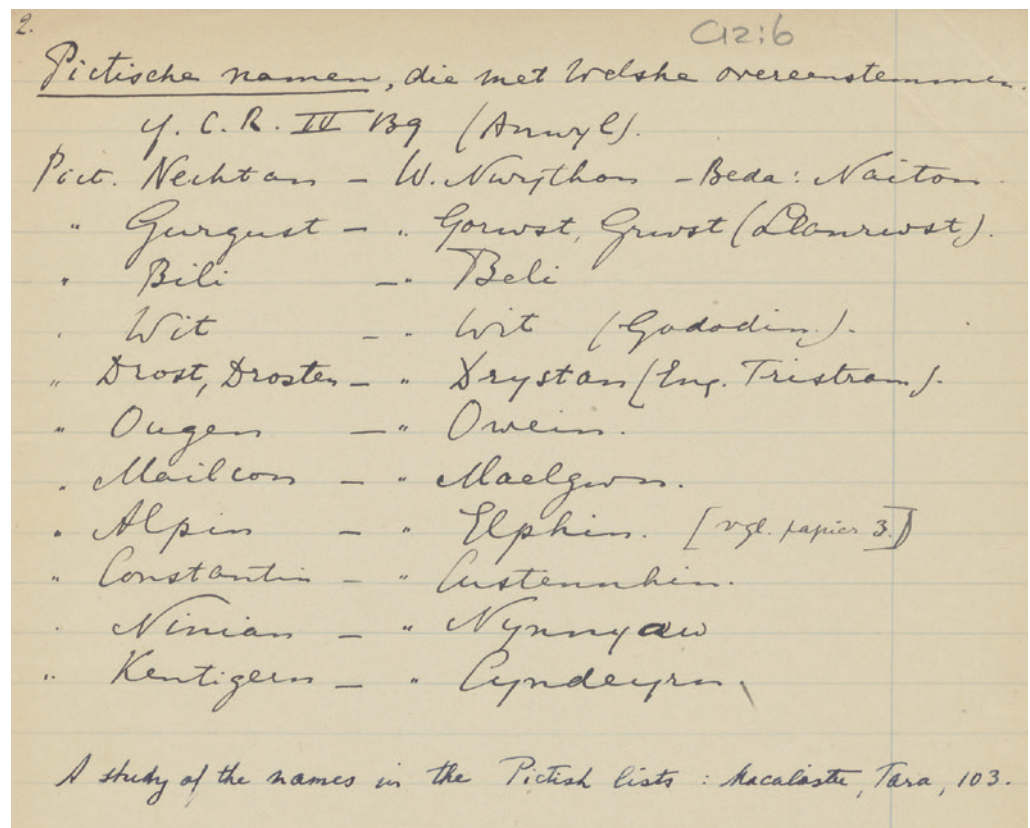
It is difficult to determine what purpose Van Hamel had in copying down the content of the book. At the very least, one can say that he was clearly interested in the grammar of Modern Scottish Gaelic. Whether he intended to do more is the question. Perhaps relevant to the question is the observation that he did not simply go through the book and make his notes. The first notebook (A 10) has a title written in pencil on the first page: *Celtische grammatica bewerkt door A.G. van Hamel jr. naar: Elements of Gaelic grammar by Alexander Stewart minister of the gospel at Dingwall, honorary member of the Highland Society of Scotland and then in pen Deel I: Etymologie*.¹⁰ The notebook does not follow the same organisation as its exemplar, however. That is, there is no section of the book on etymology, as one might expect from Van Hamel's title (and the title does seem to have been written by him). Instead, the notebook skips part I of the book (on pronunciation and orthography) and presents rather the parts of speech (part II of the book), giving very complete paradigms and otherwise extended summary of the contents. The summary of the archive's contents states that the notebook is primarily concerned with verbal forms and expressions with prepositions.¹¹ This is mostly accurate, but it should be noted that other paradigms are also well-represented.

Notebook A 27 then continues in the same vein, treating parts III and IV of the book (syntax and word formation) before summarising part I (on pronunciation and orthography) and moving onto text samples with translation and notes. Of the four short sample texts in Stewart, Van Hamel transcribes in its totality the first together with its translation and notes. The three remaining text samples are transcribed with their full translations, but

⁹ This copy (shelfmark ACA 6381) did not belong to Van Hamel's own library, and the notes in pencil do not appear to be his. It is unclear when it entered the library.

¹⁰ i.e. 'Celtic grammar adapted by A. G. van Hamel jr. from [...] and 'Part I: Etymology'.

¹¹ Van Zanten 2008, 5.



► Fig. 2. Utrecht, University Library, Archief Van Hamel, C 12, page 6: Pictish names with Welsh correspondences.

the notes are left off. After the text samples follows in Van Hamel's notebook a long vocabulary list of unclear origin, organized alphabetically from A to U across approximately 65 pages. The list does not form part of Stewart's book. It could have been made on the basis of the sample texts of the book, as a sort of supplement, but this would have to have been made separately and copied into the notebook. The vocabulary shows no evidence for additions of words at different times, which would have been inevitable had Van Hamel been making the list as he read the texts. It is possible that this is a copy of an existing small dictionary or a recopying of his own earlier draft of a vocabulary to accompany the grammar, but that is simply speculation.

Further speculation concerns the purpose of this all. As indicated above, the notebooks are not a simple copying of the material in the book, since at least some elements are rearranged. There are, in addition, two pages with detailed paradigms of some of the most common verbs: *beir* 'bring', *dean* 'do', *abair* 'say', *faic* 'see', *faigh* 'get', and *cluinn* 'hear'. Perhaps Van Hamel intended to do more with the *Gaelic grammar*, but what? A simple translation or Dutch edition of the text is thinkable, though not particularly likely. More probable is that this was yet another of his interests that he was exploring, maybe

with an eye for an article on some aspect of Scottish Gaelic grammar, but maybe not. In the end, we cannot know for sure, but these notebooks provide insight into an aspect of his linguistic interests that do not otherwise appear to have made their way into his publications.

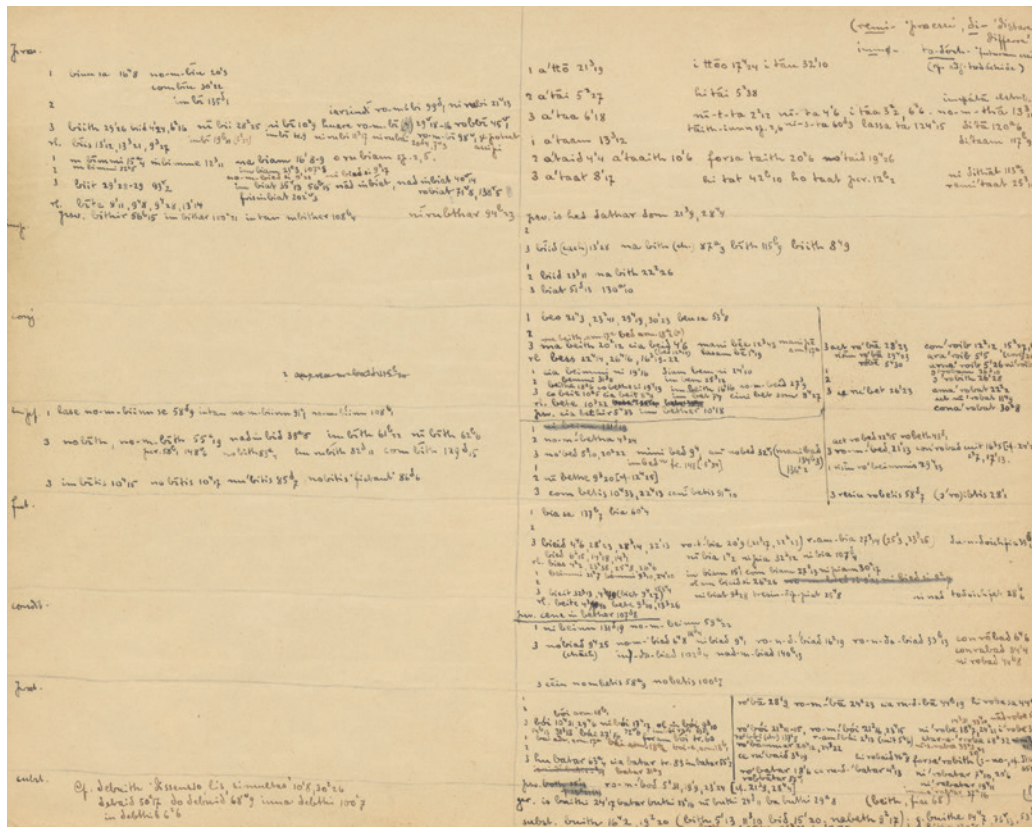
Van Hamel's lexicon of Old Irish verbs¹²

Now we may turn to what is in the archives entitled *Radices linguae Hibernicae* in the inventory of the Archief Van Hamel – a title given to it in the inventory, it does not appear in Van Hamel's notes.¹³ This section of the archive (D 1) consists of 301 large individual pages almost entirely devoted to the Old Irish verb and to Old Irish texts found in contemporary manuscripts, though there is occasional reference to forms from manuscripts of a later period, e.g. to texts from *Irische Texte*¹⁴ and *Lebor na hUidre* (see further below on the glosses). This item, more than anything else in the archive, shows how carefully and closely Van Hamel worked with language. The first few pages of this section of the archive deal with alternations between *de-* and *dí-* found in the preverb / preposition, but following that are 25 pages devoted to lists of forms of the copula and substantive verb with citations. Following these lists are approximately 225 pages that can be best described as a comprehensive lexicon of Old Irish verbal forms. On figure 3 is a photo

¹² At a very late stage of publication, it became clear that the handwriting of this document (the *Radices linguae Hibernicae*) is not Van Hamel's (nor any of his successors). Its connection to Van Hamel and the archive is not yet clear and certainly on this would clearly have an effect the argument of this paper. Given the late stage of publication, it was decided to let this section of this paper stand as written, but with the attachment of the present footnote.

¹³ Van Zanten 2008, 15. It was donated to the Archief Van Hamel by Leni van Strien in 2008, who found it among the documents of Celtic studies in Utrecht.

¹⁴ Windisch 1880; Stokes and Windisch 1884-1909.



◀ Fig. 3. Utrecht, University Library, Archief Van Hamel, D 1, page 29: forms of the substantive verb.

of one of those pages, that of the substantive verb. It can be seen that this was created with extreme care, as the forms as well as the locus of their attestation are given together. Given the considerable organisation of the lexicon as a whole, this cannot have been a first draft, but must have been a second or later draft intended as Van Hamel's working lexicon of Old Irish verb forms.

The lexicon is both more and less complete than the *Verzeichnis* of Holger Pedersen at the end of *Vergleichende Grammatik der keltischen Sprachen* vol. 2. It is less complete in that it does not cover the temporal range of materials that Pedersen does in his verbal index, being restricted mostly to Old Irish material in contemporary manuscripts. It is more complete than Pedersen's *Verzeichnis*, however, in that for the material it does cover, it gives a more complete list of forms. It is perhaps interesting to note in this connection that Van Hamel was well-acquainted with Pedersen's grammar, as he wrote reviews of its various parts.¹⁵

The ordering of entries in the lexicon is not quite alphabetical. It is arranged, as far as I can determine, along a couple axes. One is strong vs. weak. The strong verbs appear to occupy the first 150 pages of the lexicon, with weak verbs taking up the final 80. Within these rough divisions, the verbs appear to be arranged roughly alphabetically by root form, with different combinations of preverbs generally grouped together following the

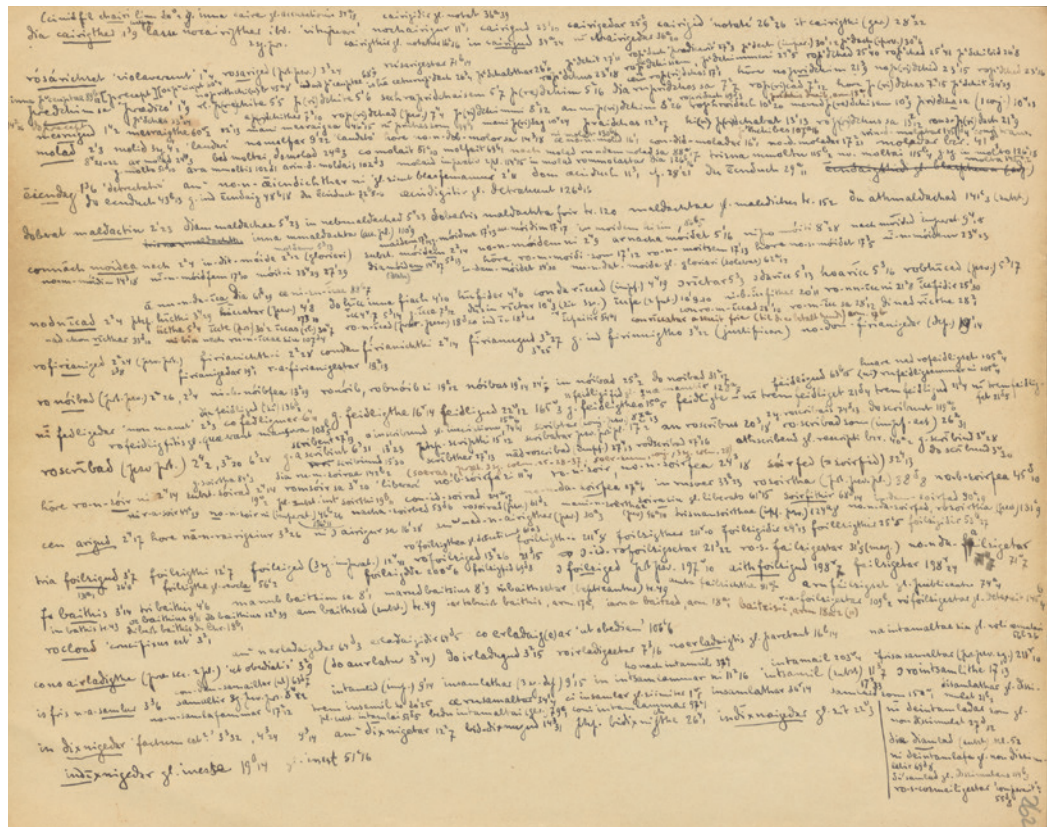
simplex (if extant). It is possible that the alphabetisation was strictly observed at first and was disturbed before the archive was catalogued, but I see no way of determining that at this point.

In order to keep the lexicon compact, Van Hamel used tiny writing and, given that the main body of forms comes from the glosses, he also devised a slightly more compact numeration system, allowing him to dispense with the designations Wb., ML., and Sg. for the Würzburg, Milan and St. Gall gloss collections. He indicates folio and gloss number according to the standard conventions as observed, for instance, in the *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus* (*Thes. Pal.*),¹⁶ but instead of indicating the column number uniformly via superscript a-d (or a-b for St. Gall), he uses superscript arabic numerals for Wb., superscript lowercase roman letters for ML., and superscript r/v for St. Gall. In this way 17² indicates Wb., 17² indicates ML., and 17² indicates St. Gall. It is a small difference from the standard denotation, but it allows for more efficient use of space and time.

As noted above, Van Hamel was primarily using those Old Irish sources found in contemporary manuscripts. As will be familiar to scholars of the early Irish language, most of these contemporary sources consist of glosses on Latin texts, both secular and sacred, though there are also non-gloss texts, both poetry and prose, that are found in contemporary manuscripts. Regardless of their

¹⁵ Van Hamel 1909, 1910b, 1915a.

¹⁶ Stokes and Strachan 1901-1903.



► Fig. 4. Utrecht, University Library, Archief Van Hamel, D 1, page 262: glossary to Wb. 1^o – 3^o32.

nature, all these texts were collected in the *Thes. Pal.*, which remains to this day the standard print edition of them and would certainly have been the most obvious source for Van Hamel to use.

Despite the convenience of using the *Thes. Pal.*, it appears that Van Hamel did not use, or at least did not always use, that edition of the Old Irish texts. The most obvious proof of this comes from the fact that Van Hamel has four entries (D 1, 283) from the Klosterneuburger *Lorica*, which is not a text included in the *Thes. Pal.* (it also happens to be the only non-Old Irish text, as it is late Middle Irish).¹⁷ Beyond this, however, it is clear that even for Old Irish texts included in *Thes. Pal.*, he sometimes used another source. This is suggested by the numbering of the glosses on Augustine's *Soliloquia* found in Carlsruhe. In *Thes. Pal.*, these glosses are given via folio and column (*Thes. Pal.* II 1–9) but in Van Hamel's lexicon and glossary (see below) they are numbered continuously. It seems unlikely that Van Hamel would introduce continuous numbering himself. It is, however, not clear to me what source he was using.

There is another reason, though less assured, that might lead one to suspect that Van Hamel was not using the *Thes. Pal.* when he could have. After the lexicon come approximately 40 pages of what can best be called a glossary, which shows Van Hamel systematically reading through a number of Old Irish texts, essentially the same

ones that appear also in the lexicon. The texts used in the glossary largely correspond to those found in *Thes. Pal.*, but they do not seem to have any relation to the order of texts in *Thes. Pal.* In the listing below, I give the texts in the order they are found in Van Hamel's glossary, followed by the place of these texts the *Thes. Pal.* Though the first two pages of the glossary are out of order (they belong to Wb.), there are notes for Wb. from 1^o9 to the end (*Thes. Pal.* I 501–714), followed by glosses to the Carlsruhe Augustine (*Thes. Pal.* II 1–9), Carlsruhe Priscian (*Thes. Pal.* II 225–230), and Carlsruhe Bede (*Thes. Pal.* II 10–30), and then Sg. (*Thes. Pal.* II 49–224). Then come the Turin glosses (*Thes. Pal.* I 484–494), glosses on Eutychiu (*Thes. Pal.* II 42) and the Vienna Bede (*Thes. Pal.* II 31–37), the Klosterneuburger *Lorica* (not in *Thes. Pal.*; see above), the poems in the Codex S. Pauli (*Thes. Pal.* I 293–295), followed by glosses on Philargyrius (*Thes. Pal.* II 46–48, 360–363) and Ml. (*Thes. Pal.* I 7–483), a page blank but for a single entry from the Book of Armagh (*Thes. Pal.* II 238–243) and one page for the Old Irish hymns (*Thes. Pal.* II 298–359).

The glossary is very full for Wb., though it becomes much more sparse later on. Unlike the lexicon discussed previously, the glossary is not limited to verbs. There is also considerable cross-referencing of forms, as can be seen from figure 4.

¹⁷ See Stifter 2007, 512.

As noted above, the ordering of texts in the glossary suggests that Van Hamel was not using the *Thes. Pal.* Further, not all of the texts in *Thes. Pal.* are included in the glossary. It seems that, whether or not Van Hamel was using *Thes. Pal.* as a source, it was not his primary source. A very close examination might reveal alternate readings that would allow one to draw conclusions.¹⁸

As with the notes to the *Gaelic grammar*, one can again ask what purpose the lexicon and glossary may have had. Here, I think we are on somewhat safer ground than with the *Gaelic grammar*. While the lexicon especially gives every impression of having been compiled with utmost care, it seems unlikely that it was intended for anything more than private use. It may not be out of place to note that during Van Hamel's lifetime, resources for the study of Old Irish were nothing like what they are today. Only two volumes (D-Dégoir and E) of the *Dictionary of the Irish language* appeared while he was alive, and although other publications covered additional ground,¹⁹ vast swaths of the Early Irish lexicon remained without a functional dictionary. Against that background, the Old Irish lexicon and glossary that Van

Hamel put together were most likely for his own use in teaching and scholarship. It is logical to assume that he developed them after his arrival in Utrecht, when he began to regularly teach Old Irish to students. To be more sure of this, we would need to have an indication of the dates of the material in the archive, but, sadly, this does not seem possible.

This, then, brings us to the end of our look at Van Hamel's interest in Celtic grammars. While some of the information can be gathered from an examination of his published work, there is more to it than might be suspected by relying solely on that record. The preceding has hopefully made clear that Van Hamel's concerns with the Celtic languages and their grammars were both broad and deep. It is a pity that more of his scholarship on the topic did not appear in print. His verbal lexicon would have been supremely useful, and probably would be even today. Fortunately, this work is preserved in his archive, even if not in published form.

☞

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¹⁸ Two brief examples can show what directions one might explore. In the lexicon entry for the substantive verb (D 1, 29) Van Hamel gives a form of the verbal noun as *beith*, referring to Fiacc's Hymn, line 68. This is the reading of the T text; the F text has *bith*; and *Thes. Pal.* reconstructs *buith* (*Thes. Pal.* II, 321). While I do not have the edition, this sort of variation will allow one to (perhaps) find it. Similarly, one glossary entry for the Klosterneuburger *Lorica* gives the text as *r-a-mthi* (D 1, 283). As the reading in Zeuss is *raucthi* (1873, 954), it is clear that this was not the edition Van Hamel used. Further triangulation using the glossary entry *na ra-m-tairthea* suggests that Stokes' edition (1873-1875) is more like than Zimmer's (1881).

¹⁹ See Griffith, Stifter and Toner 2018, 4-5, for an overview of available resources.

‘A wild longing of Irish manuscripts’: A. G. van Hamel’s textual editions

RANKE DE VRIES

In a letter addressed to the Irish scholar Richard Irvine Best dated New Year’s Eve 1918, Van Hamel expressed a desire to visit Ireland in the near future.¹ Not merely to visit Best and his wife Edith, but also to consult Irish manuscripts, for, as Van Hamel put it, ‘There is a wild longing in me of Irish manuscripts.’² It is true that there is something magical about medieval manuscripts. It’s not just the scent of the vellum or the crackling when one turns a folio; it’s the fact that one can literally touch words that were written down eight or nine centuries ago – words that may have not been read at all, or only fleetingly, since then.

Fortunately, there are people like Van Hamel who love diving into dusty Irish libraries, not only to decipher the contents of these manuscripts, but also to edit them. Regrettably, this is not something that happens on a large scale. Editing (medieval Irish) texts is important, since such texts form the basis of much of the research in the field. Textual edition is not necessarily without its difficulties, however, and for each published text, there is probably at least one unfinished edition gathering dust in an office drawer (or digitally as a file on a computer somewhere).³ This was also the case for Van Hamel. This article focuses in large part on those editions by Van Hamel that were never completed – not to highlight any failings on the part of Van Hamel, but rather to elucidate how research can get derailed, and to show that despite all obstacles, Van Hamel persevered in his attempts to edit texts.

First attempts

What could have been Van Hamel’s *magnum opus*, a textual edition of the long pseudo-historical work *Lebor gabála Érenn*, known as ‘The book of invasions’, turned into one of a series of disappointments that plagued Van Hamel between 1910 and 1920. He stopped his work on the edition itself in 1913, when it turned out that the Irish scholar R. A. S. Macalister was in the advanced stages of editing the text.⁴ Van Hamel adapted all of his hard work into an article that appeared in 1915 in the *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*.⁵ There are a dozen notebooks in Van Hamel’s archives that contain material for this edition, which goes to show that at that stage, he had spent a lot of time and effort on the endeavour. This alone would have been enough to deter many others from any further textual editing – not so Van Hamel.⁶

The next blow that Van Hamel had to endure concerns the first of his textual editions that actually appeared in print: three poems (without a translation, but accompanied by textual notes), transcribed from manuscripts in the Royal Library in Brussels, which Van Hamel had visited in 1913.⁷ The poems appeared in print during the First World War as two separate articles in *Revue celtique* 36.⁸ Van Hamel himself was very unhappy with the printed editions, since they had been based on uncorrected proofs – the war had made any further communication about the edition impossible. As a result, Van Hamel published corrected versions of all of these poems in *Revue celtique* 37.⁹

¹ With thanks to Gregory Darwin for his digital photograph of the first edition of Van Hamel’s *Immrama*. I would also like to thank the editors of this book, especially Bart Jaski. His help was crucial in my writing this article, since I am not based in the Netherlands, which meant that I could not consult the archives in person. This is in a way appropriate, as Van Hamel often had to call on colleagues in Ireland, who helped him transcribe manuscripts for his editions that Van Hamel himself could not access from the Netherlands. Many, many thanks.

² VH to R. I. Best (31-12-1918), NLI.

³ To give an example: at this moment my office contains, among other things, an unfinished textual edition of Máelmuir Othna’s ninth-century pseudohistorical poem *Can a mbunadas na nGoídel* ‘Where do the Goídil come from’, based on twelve manuscript versions, which I started in 1998. I recently began an edition of a sixteenth-century medical manuscript (TCD MS 1698). Hopefully this edition will not suffer the same fate.

⁴ For an in-depth discussion of the dramatic saga of the edition of *Lebor gabála*, see Bart Jaski’s contribution “‘I am as yet incomplete’”: A. G. van Hamel in his youth’ in this volume, and see also Flahive 2009.

⁵ Van Hamel 1915b.

⁶ Macalister ended up publishing one volume on *Lebor gabála* in 1916, in conjunction with the scholar Eoin MacNeill. Afterwards, between 1939 and 1956 (in part after Macalister’s death in 1950), an edition in five volumes appeared as part of the main publication series of the Irish Texts Society. It is a shame that Van Hamel’s edition was never published, since Macalister’s edition was not warmly received. However, despite all the criticism, no other edition of the text has been published since, and Macalister’s edition is still widely used.

⁷ Letter VH to R. I. Best (30-1-1918), NLI.

⁸ Van Hamel 1915-1916c and d. See also UBU, Archief Van Hamel, B 6 and B 7, for preliminary studies to these editions.

⁹ Van Hamel 1917-1919a and b. For the most part, the differences between the publications relate to the introductions to the poems, rather than the transcriptions of the poems themselves.

Following this, Van Hamel focused on work related to St. Brendan, which, like *Lebor gabála*, never made it to print. Van Hamel wrote to Best that he was working on a few short religious texts, including one involving a vision of hell by Brendan which he had also transcribed in Brussels back in 1913.¹⁰ Not much is known about this particular edition. At the same time, he was working on a text that he referred to as *Betha Brenainn*. He appears to have abandoned this edition by 1919, based on a dejected remark in a letter to Best, dated 27 August 1919: 'I never sent you any reply as to *yøu* [sic] what you should do with my abortive text of *Betha Brenainn*. Should you have it still, the best thing would be to give it to Plummer, who may still have some good from it [...]'.¹¹

These setbacks may have kept Van Hamel from any further attempts at textual edition for roughly a decade.¹² But the urge to edit had not completely abandoned him, and in the early 1930s, Van Hamel published two works that are still in use today: *Lebor Bretnach* ('The British book') and *Compert Con Culainn and other stories*.

Lebor Bretnach and Compert Con Culainn and other stories

Some of the first traces of Van Hamel's plans to edit *Lebor Bretnach* appear in a letter to Best, dated July 19, 1930. In this letter, Van Hamel indicated that he was 'fiercely interested in the Irish Nennius [...]'.¹³ This refers to an Irish version of the *Historia Brittonum*, a Latin work concerning the history of Britain, with material on (among other things) the Angles, Saxons, king Arthur, and Vortigern, traditionally attributed to Nennius, a ninth-century Welsh scholar.¹⁴ About a month later, Van Hamel had managed to transcribe almost all of the manuscripts, and had visited Eoin MacNeill, who agreed to publish the work under the aegis of the Irish Manuscripts Commission.¹⁵ Work progressed steadily. A little over a year later, Van Hamel set to work on the introduction to *Lebor Bretnach*. He asked Best for help in dating the manuscripts, and in deciphering a tricky

passage on November 23, 1931. At that stage, he had already seen a first set of proofs. The introduction was completed by May 1932, and Van Hamel requested that Best take a quick look at it. It seems that Best made a significant number of changes and improvements, based on Van Hamel's gratitude towards Best, and his expression of thanks in a letter dated 2 July 1932, when he had received the proofs of this revised introduction.¹⁶

Van Hamel's edition is based on six different copies of the text, which can be found in five different manuscripts. Although Van Hamel has (in his own words) incorporated the text from all manuscripts into his edition, the text which is presented to the reader can be regarded as a literary Frankenstein's monster – to put it bluntly: Van Hamel composed a new text that was cut and pasted from the various manuscript texts.¹⁷

The second edition, *Compert Con Culainn and other stories*, appeared a year later in 1933,¹⁸ as a volume in the series Mediaeval and Modern Irish Series of the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies. This series is intended for students of the Irish language, and consists of textual editions without a translation, but with an introduction, textual notes, and a glossary.

The work itself contains four different stories from different periods of the Irish language that all focus on the hero Cú Chulainn, respectively *Compert Con Culainn* ('The conception of Cú Chulainn'), *Aided Oífnir Aífe* ('The death of Aífe's only son'); *Tochmarc Emire* ('The wooing of Emer'); and *Aided Con Culainn* ('The violent death of Cú Chulainn'). Van Hamel adapted these texts in many places, so that they might be easier for students to decipher, and so that they could serve as teaching materials. This appears to have been his stated goal, as mentioned by Vendryes in his review of the edition: 'More than anything else, the author has intended to provide a good scientific and methodological tool for students, and he has succeeded in this.'¹⁹

¹⁰ See also UBU, Archief Van Hamel, B 9.

¹¹ Letter VH to R. I. Best (27-8-1919), NLI. This may refer to Plummer 1922.

¹² Van Hamel did produce a detailed critical review of Margaret Dobbs's edition of *Cath Leitreach Ruide* ('The battle of Leitir Ruide') (Dobbs 1922; Van Hamel 1927d). Van Hamel disagreed with Dobbs's assertion that the version of the text that she edited from Royal Irish Academy MS C i 2 was virtually identical to the one in the manuscript Edinburgh Kilbride V (now Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, Adv. MS 721.5), apart from some older language in the latter. Van Hamel demonstrates that this is not the case, that the later version is more accurate, and that both versions stem from a common exemplar (59-60). Dobbs does not provide any readings from the Scottish manuscript in her edition, and Van Hamel's comparison of both manuscript versions is so detailed that he must have had access to transcriptions or images of the Edinburgh manuscripts.

¹³ VH to R. I. Best (19-7-1930), NLI.

¹⁴ James Henthorn Todd had previously edited this text in 1848, based on three manuscripts: Trinity College Dublin MS 1336 (*olim* H.3.17); the Book of Ballymote; and the Book of Lecan (see Todd 1848, v-xiv, for a description and comparison of the manuscript versions). It is important to note that *Lebor Bretnach* is not a literal translation of *Historia Brittonum* as the text in *Lebor Bretnach* has, wherever necessary, been supplemented with other (Irish) materials (see Dooley 2004, 12-13).

¹⁵ VH to Edith Best (13-8-1930), NLI.

¹⁶ VH to R. I. Best (23-11-1931, 17-5-1932 and 2-7-1932), NLI.

¹⁷ Van Hamel explained what he had done in his introduction: 'We shall divide the complete *Lebor Bretnach* into twenty-two sections; it must be borne in mind, however, that these are found combined in none of our MSS', Van Hamel 1932a, v. On that same page, Van Hamel explained that 'For each section a MS. has been selected that is regarded as representative of the group or groups in which the section occurs'. His edition was discussed in Pokorny 1936 and Vendryes 1938. For criticism related to Van Hamel's edition, see Thurneysen 1936, Lot 1934, 135-42 (see Dooley 2004, 11 for the reference to Lot).

¹⁸ A preliminary study related to this edition can be found in UBU, Archief Van Hamel, H 1, a notebook which contains a transcription of part of *Aided Con Culainn*, corresponding to pp. 113-125 in Van Hamel's edition. The edition is briefly discussed in Mühlhausen 1941, along with a number of other volumes that appeared as part of the Mediaeval and Modern Irish Series.

¹⁹ Vendryes 1938, 389: 'L'auteur s'est proposé avant tout d'en faire un bon instrument de science et de méthode pour les étudiants, et il y a réussi'.

Immráma

After these successes, Van Hamel set to work on his next project: an edition of *immram*-tales.²⁰ These were slated to be published in the Mediaeval and Modern Irish Series, just like *Compert Con Culainn and other stories*. Van Hamel had originally intended to include five tales in the edition. Only four of them made it to the final version: *Immrám Brain maic Febail* ('The sea voyage of Bran mac Febail'), *Immrám curaig Maíle Dúin* ('The sea-voyage of Máel Dúin's coracle'), *Immrám Snédgusa ocus Maic Riagla* ('The sea-voyage of Snédgus and Mac Riagla') and *Immrám curaig Úa Corra* ('The sea-voyage of the coracle of the Uí Chorra').²¹ The fifth text, *Immrám Brendain*, which he did work on, never appeared as part of the edition.²²

Van Hamel spent at least five years off and on working on the *Immráma*-edition. He referred to the edition in a letter to Best, dated 24 December 1936, where the first signs of the various adversities that Van Hamel was to encounter can be seen:

By this time I have finished my text (with notes and variants) of *Immrám Brain*; it differs considerably from K[uno] M[eyer]'s and, consequently, also from its American counterpart (your alarming news about this affair was new to me) [...] I will send it soon to [Myles] Dillon and continue working at Maeldúin in the meantime.²³

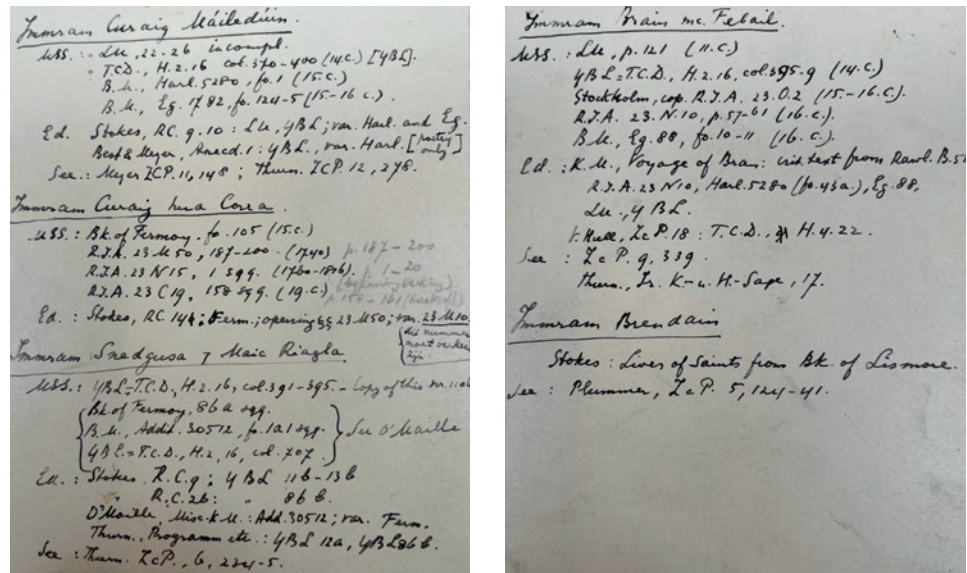
After this, things appeared to improve. About a year later, on December 26, 1937, Van Hamel was exuberant in his letter to Best:

I am glad to tell you that my volume of *Immráma* is ready by this time. [...] On the 15th of January [1938] a very gifted pupil of mine. Miss Dr. [Maartje] Draak, is coming to Dublin [...] She will have my *Immráma* MS in her satchel when she comes to see you and nothing would give me more pleasure than if the authorities would decide upon printing the edition at once. I have been very careful about the 'copy' and trust the reading of proofs can be done at a fair pace.²⁴

Maartje Draak did in fact bring the manuscript to Dublin, as evidenced by a letter by Van Hamel dated March 19, 1938.²⁵ In that same letter, Van Hamel instructed Draak regarding the edition:

Before you leave, you should casually ask Best to see what they are currently doing with my manuscript. I fear terribly that in Dillon's absence, it was entrusted to Bergin, and that he has been making 'clever' changes to it, changes that I have been deliberate in avoiding. He would be entitled to do so as editor of the series, but I would find that hugely aggravating (although I would certainly never let him know that).²⁶

➤ Fig. 1. Overview of the intended contents of Van Hamel's *Immráma*, with reference to *Immrám Brendain* at the end. Utrecht, University Library, Archief Van Hamel, F 10.



²⁰ The word *immram* literally means 'rowing around', and refers to a tale in which the main character undertakes a sea voyage that includes visiting a number of (wondrous) islands. Most *immrama* are Christian in nature.

²¹ Preliminary studies related to the edition can be found in UBU, Archief Van Hamel, F 1-15.

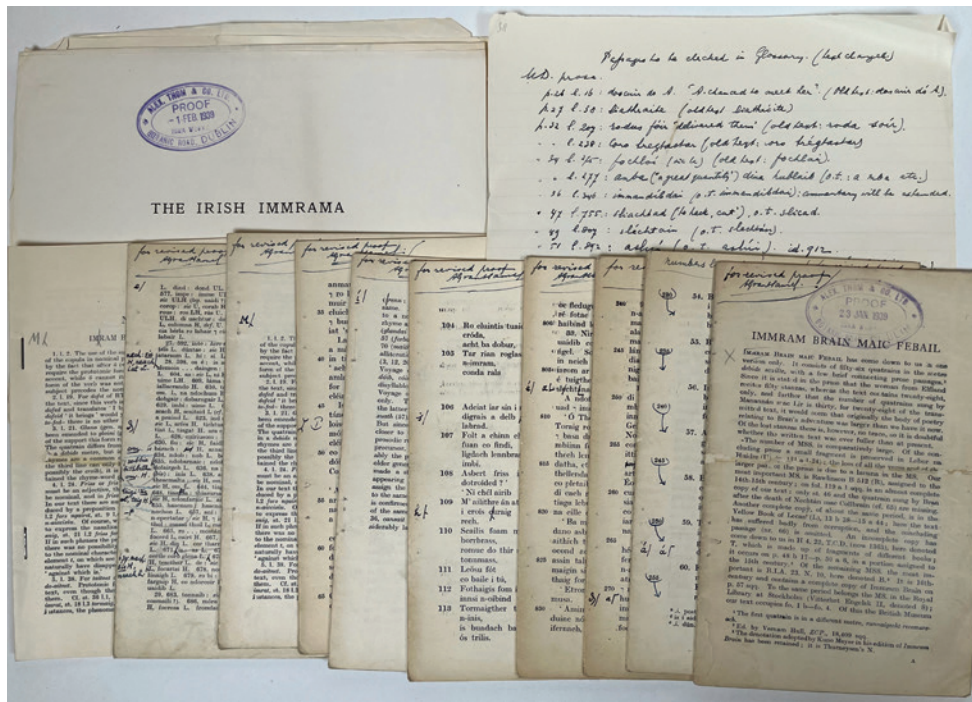
²² In his notes (UBU, Archief Van Hamel, F 10), Van Hamel uses the title *Immrám Brendain* to signify the Life of Brendan of Clonfert, and refers to Stokes's edition (1890, 99-116 and 247-261); see also Plummer 1922, I, xviii-xix, regarding the manuscripts containing *Betha Brenainn Clúana Ferta*.

²³ VH to R. I. Best (24-12-1936), NLI. The reference to the 'alarming news' with relation to Meyer's 'American counterpart' may refer to Hull 1930.

²⁴ VH to R. I. Best (26-12-1937).

²⁵ This 'manuscript' is potentially Van Hamel's typescript titled 'The Irish immrama' (177 pp. including Glossary), UBU, Archief Van Hamel, F 12.

²⁶ VH to A. M. E. Draak (19-2-1938), UBU, Archief Draak, C 4: 'Je moet voor je vertrek eens langs je neus weg aan Best vragen, wat ze op het ogenblik met mijn manuscript doen. Ik ben zo bang, dat het bij afwezigheid van Dillon aan Bergin is toevertrouwd en dat die er neuswijze veranderingen in is gaan aanbrengen, die ik met opzet vermeden heb. Hij zou daar als serie-redacteur het recht toe hebben, maar ik zou het allervervelendst vinden (maar dit laatste vooral niet laten merken)'.



◀ Fig. 2. Proofs from 1939 with Van Hamel's corrections (in pen). At top right, notes for changes to the glossary. Utrecht, University Library, Archief Van Hamel, F 14.

Van Hamel received the first proofs in August 1938, incorporated changes to them, and returned the corrected proofs to Dublin in October.²⁷ The glossary was not included at that stage, as it would make more logical sense not to finish it until the texts themselves had been completed. Van Hamel had not heard anything from the printer by December, however. This displeased him greatly, and he showed this in his letter to Best:

The Glossary is still here. I followed your wise advice and waited until I should have received proofs in page of the texts. These have not yet arrived. I sent back the first proofs (in 'spoons') before the end of October and, since there was put '1938' on the title-page, expected to get the second proof (in page) before the end of the year. Nothing of the kind happened, however. As soon as I get the second proof, I will add references in the Glossary, and send the copy of the Glossary to the printer. What is he doing in the meantime?²⁸

In February 1939, the new proofs arrived, printed on the paper and format used for the volumes in the Mediaeval and Modern Irish Series. Van Hamel incorporated further corrections.²⁹

This new version was then partly examined by Eleanor Knott, and Best passed along her corrections to Van Hamel on July 31, 1939. Knott had been working at the *Dictionary of the Irish language* since 1911, and became professor in Old Irish at Trinity College Dublin in 1939. She was highly critical of Van Hamel's work, especially regarding his decision to present an eclectic edition of *Immram curaig Maile Dúin*, which is to say that a new text was created from different manuscript versions (i.e. the same procedure that Van Hamel had adopted in his work on *Lebor Bretnach*). She was also displeased at the fact that Van Hamel had reconstructed vocabulary for his *Immram curaig Úa Corra* that had never existed.³⁰ Knott appears to have preferred a diplomatic edition overall in which the complete text was presented from two manuscripts.³¹

She stated with regard to *Immram curaig Úa Corra*:

In this text, which, as you say, cannot be derived from an O.-Ir. archetype, it would have been more satisfactory (to put it mildly) not to tamper with the forms at all, and instead, to have provided the student with a commentary. Some of the changes result in readings quite impossible for any period of the

²⁷ UBU, Archief Van Hamel, F 13 contains a set of printed proofs on contiguous sheets of A4 paper stamped by the printer Alex Thom, dated August 13, 1938, with corrections added by Van Hamel. He likely sent a copy of this set to Dublin in October 1938.

²⁸ VH to R. I. Best (29-12-1938), NLI. In the course of 1938, an article by Van Hamel had appeared in print comparing the various manuscript versions of *Immram curaig Maile Dúin*, but this did not include the text itself (Van Hamel 1938a).

²⁹ UBU, Archief Van Hamel, F 14, with stamps dated January 23, January 27, and February 1, 1939. A note further states that two quires in the same format as the edition that was published were given to 'Ms. Crena de Jongh' (Crena de Jongh) to bring along with her to Ireland.

³⁰ E. Knott, notes for VH (July 1939), UBU, Archief Van Hamel, F 15 B: 'Speaking for myself I regret very much that you have chosen to present an eclectic text. [...] Apart from the general plan of editing, there [...] are a number of places where I think your text is not well chosen'. For a discussion of a number of concrete examples of adaptations that Van Hamel made to the text of *Immram Curaig Úa Corra*, see Breatnach 2003.

³¹ E. Knott, notes for VH (July 1939), UBU, Archief Van Hamel, F 15 B: 'I should have followed the MS (apart from obvious orthographical corrections) and treated questions of corruption, original readings etc. in a detailed commentary'.

language [...] I have not had time to read Sn[édgus] and Macc R[iagla]. or Im[mram].Br[ain]. I have not read the text of the metrical versions. I think it is a pity they were included in this volume.³²

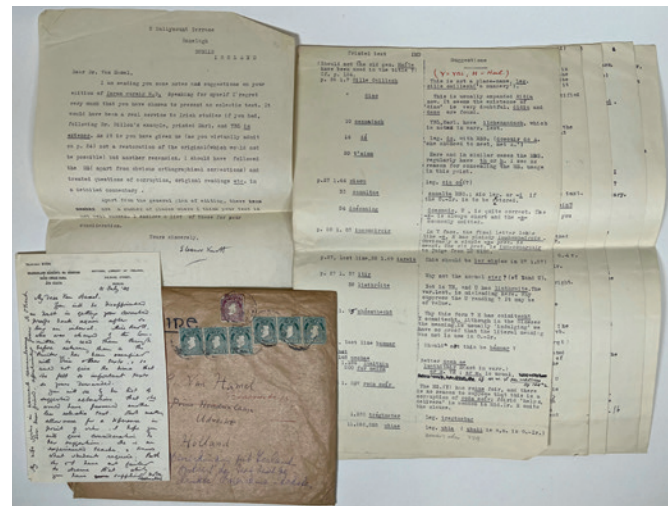
At this point, Knott had not yet looked at the glossary either.³³ Best clearly realized that Van Hamel would in all likelihood be quite unhappy with both any further delays and Knott's criticisms. In his letter to Van Hamel, dated July 31, 1939, Best wrote:

You will be disappointed no doubt in getting your corrected proofs back again after so long an interval [...] I hope you will give consideration to her [Knott's] suggestions. She is an experienced teacher, & knows what students require. [...] Do not I beseech you feel discouraged, if the sharpest of Irish critics has found points of difference.³⁴

Van Hamel proceeded to correct his edition, and sent along his answer to Knott's suggestions in a letter dated March 1, 1940 – nine days before Germany invaded the Netherlands. For the most part, Van Hamel had adopted Knott's corrections, although he refused to change the eclectic nature of the edition itself, as this would essentially mean that he would have to produce an entirely new edition. Van Hamel did not want to run the risk that his work would subsequently be judged by someone other than Knott, who again might suggest a different kind of edition.³⁵ Van Hamel urged for a speedy publication of the edition, including the glossary:

May I add that it would mean a great satisfaction to me if the printing, also of the Glossary, could be effected now without too much delay? I know, after keeping you waiting for these proofs, there is a heavy guilt on my own shoulders in this respect, but my difficulties were large and I promise to do quick work in the future. In this you may trust me.³⁶

The Second World War threw a wrench in the works. Although Van Hamel's edition eventually appeared



▲ Fig. 3. Letter from Best to Van Hamel (bottom left) alongside Knott's comments (top left) and corrections with regard to the proofs on Van Hamel's *Immrama* (right). Utrecht, University Library, Archief Van Hamel F 15A-B.

in print in 1941, the glossary was unfortunately not included. To this day, this glossary has not come out, although a first draft of it can be found in the Van Hamel archives.³⁷

For a time after Van Hamel's death in 1945, Maartje Draak had plans to edit the glossary herself, as is evident from a number of letters written to her in 1950, 1951, and 1953 by Vernam Hull. Hull repeatedly inquired after the glossary, but Draak never ended up publishing it.³⁸

The fact that Van Hamel never let go of his 'wild longing of Irish manuscripts', not even during the Second World War, and despite all earlier abandoned attempts, can be seen from a number of notebooks containing material related to an edition of *Lebor na gCert*, a twelfth-century text concerning the right of the king of Caisel to taxes from the kings of Ireland. Unfortunately, this edition was never completed either – this time due to Van Hamel's

32 E. Knott, notes for VH (July 1939), UBU, Archief Van Hamel F 15B.

33 It is possible that Knott worked on this at a later stage, see Fagan 2011, 104, document 12 O 23/8: 'Typewritten draft for a glossary, with handwritten annotation and corrections – undated. List of Irish words with translations and grammatical notes; advising the reader to also consult the 'Glossary to *Compert con Culainn and other stories*' mentioning 'Immram Brain', 'Immram Curaig Maile Dúin', 'Immram Snédgusa' and 'Immram Ua Corra.'. Document 12 O 23/9 in the same collection appears to be a later version of document 12 O 23/8.

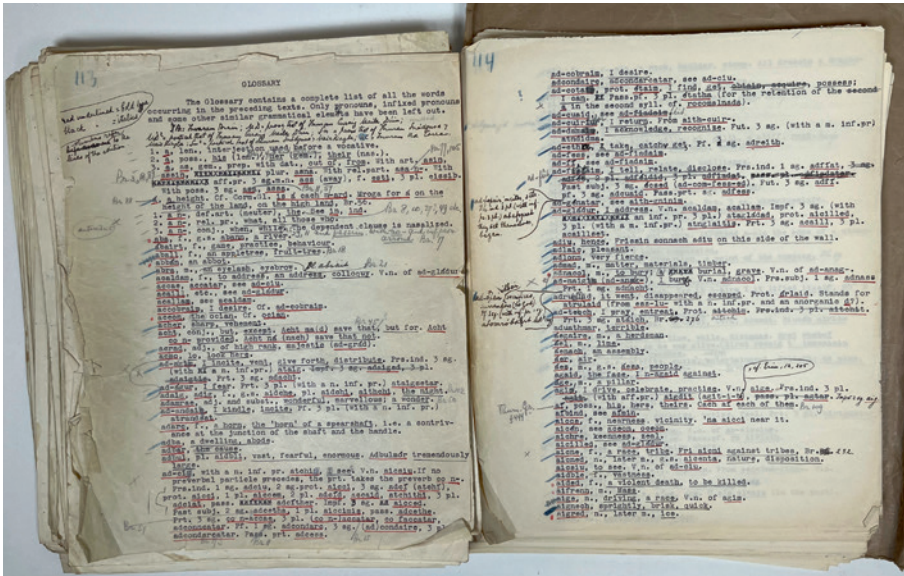
34 UBU, Archief Van Hamel, F 15A.

35 VH to R. I. Best (1-3-1940), NLI.

36 VH to R. I. Best (1-3-1940), NLI.

37 For a draft of the glossary, see UBU, Archief Van Hamel, F 12. In the 1938 and 1939 proofs of the volume, the Glossary is absent, but the 1939 proofs (F 14) do contain a document with a list of 'Passages to be checked in Glossary'. Van Hamel does not mention the missing Glossary in his *Immrama* edition, but the original first edition of the volume from 1941 contains an insert printed in red ink that explains (among other things) the missing glossary: 'Owing to war conditions having unfortunately made it impossible to communicate with the Editor, this volume is issued without the Preface he would have provided and the Glossary he had prepared, but which had not been set up. [...]' With many thanks to Gregory Darwin for providing me with a photograph of the insert. It is interesting to note that Vendryes, who reviewed *Immrama* in 1948, did not appear to have this information. In his review of Van Hamel's edition, he stated: 'Contrary to as is customary for this series, this volume is not accompanied by any glossary. This is a shame, since it contains rare words of which the meaning should be further qualified, as well as verbal forms that might end up embarrassing many readers' ('Contrairement aux habitudes de la collection, ce recueil d'Immrama n'est accompagné d'aucun glossaire. C'est dommage; car on y rencontre des mots rares dont le sens aurait besoin d'être précisé et des formes verbales qui risquent d'embarrasser bien des lecteurs'), Vendryes 1948, 410.

38 V. Hull to A. M. E. Draak, UBU, Archief Draak, C 4.



◀ Fig. 4. Two pages of Van Hamel's glossary for the *Immrama*. Utrecht, University Library, Archief Van Hamel, F 12.

untimely demise. He did manage to correspond about this work with Myles Dillon, who eventually published an edition of the text.³⁹

Not finishing textual editions is, as stated above, a common occurrence, even now. Van Hamel's various editions that never saw the light of day can be seen as a testament to his extraordinary tenacity. Time and time again, he began new textual editions, whether they were ever completed or not, until the bitter end. And who is to say that abandoned editions such as

these will not be useful in the future? Nowadays, in an era of digitization, more is possible than ever before, and creating a digital environment in which people can place their unfinished transcriptions or editions is eminently achievable. These unfinished projects can then serve as a point of departure for, or can assist in, any future textual editions. Who knows? Perhaps one day, we will be able to read Van Hamel's *Immrama* with its glossary included.

CS

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A. G. van Hamel and Arthur

BERNADETTE SMELIK

Anton Gerard van Hamel is best known for his work on linguistics.¹ Scholars of Middle Dutch Arthurian literature, by contrast, know him mainly for having been the supervisor of Maartje Draak, who obtained her doctoral degree on the Middle Dutch Arthurian romance *Roman van Walewein*. One may wonder why Van Hamel, being a celticist, would have been willing to supervise Maartje Draak. His correspondence, however, reveals that he was known abroad as an Arthurian scholar. In Wim Gerritsen's biography of Draak, a note from Van Hamel to Draak is cited:

I pass for an 'Arthurian scholar' abroad, but here in Holland they surely know better, – or at any rate you yourself will know better.²

That he held this reputation abroad may be explained in various ways. Van Hamel published on several Arthurian romances. Moreover, academic literary scholarship was an activity undertaken by comparatively few people, only a small proportion of whom immersed themselves in this particular body of literature. This chapter centres on Van Hamel's published works. What was his contribution to the study of the Arthurian romances?

Publications

Throughout his life, Van Hamel published on aspects of Arthurian literature. He may have become interested in the subject through the work of his uncle, after whom he was named.³ He wrote articles on the *Torec*, a story inserted into the Middle Dutch Lancelot compilation;⁴ Tristan's fight with the dragon;⁵ Arthur's father;⁶ the Grail;⁷ and the historicity of Arthur (both in his edition of *Lebor Bretnach* and in an article).⁸ It is not surprising then that he attended the very first congress devoted

exclusively to the subject of Arthur in 1930, in Truro (Cornwall).

The journal *Neophilologus*, of which he was editor, contains a charming account of this meeting. For instance, he reports:

Given the broad field of research to be surveyed at this congress, which cannot be covered in its entirety by any one man, scholars of many different disciplines were brought together and to this the congress owed its importance: for once, the issues were discussed from an entirely different perspective than that to which one had grown accustomed through one's own specialist studies.⁹

He discusses the fact that this broad diversity also caused people to 'sometimes talk past each other'.¹⁰ But also that when they separated, 'some groups of attendees were closer together than at the start'.¹¹ These are observations that every attendee of a congress can relate to into the present day, including the fact that opinions were expressed 'that were doomed to isolation'.¹² The report does not fail to mention the joint trip to Truro. Worth including here in full is the participants' meeting with the bards of Cornwall:

The ceremony at Liskeard, where the vice-presidents of the Congress in attendance and Prof. Vinaver were ordained "Honorary Bards" by the "Gorsedd" of the Cornish bards, held a special charm. The bards in their blue robes called us by our bardic names and, after the bardic offering was made, led us before the Chief Bard, in whose hands we took our vows, before addressing the surrounding audience. At the end of the ceremony, we were also permitted to touch King Arthur's sword.¹³

¹ I am grateful to Bart Jaski and Arwen van Zanten for making transcriptions of the letters Van Hamel sent to Draak available to me. I thank Rijcklof Hofman for his comments and willingness to discuss this article with me.

² Gerritsen 2019, 72: 'Ik ga in het buitenland door voor een 'Arthurian scholar', maar hier in Holland weten ze wel beter, – althans je zult zelf wel beter weten'. See also VH to Draak (16-11-1933), UBU, Archief Draak, C 4.

³ His uncle was the Romance scholar Antonius Gerardus van Hamel (1842-1907), who, among other things, published an analysis of Chrétien de Troyes' *Cligès*, reading it as an anti-Tristan story (1904); in this, he followed Wendelin Foerster, who first edited the text in 1884.

⁴ Van Hamel 1916a.

⁵ Van Hamel 1924b.

⁶ Van Hamel 1927c.

⁷ Van Hamel 1930a.

⁸ Van Hamel 1932a and 1943b.

⁹ Van Hamel 1931a, 55: 'Gegeven het ruime veld van onderzoek, dat op dit congres overzien moest worden, en dat voor één mensch niet in zijn geheel te bestrijken is, waren geleerden van allerlei stempel bijeengebracht en daaraan had het congres zijn belangrijkheid te danken: men hoorde de vraagstukken eens van een geheel ander punt van uitgang uit bespreken dan dat, waaraan men zelf door zijn vakstudie gewoon is'.

¹⁰ Van Hamel 1931a, 55: 'wel eens langs elkander heen praatte'.

¹¹ Van Hamel 1931a, 55: 'enkele groepen der congresleden dichter bij elkaar [stonden] dan bij den aanvang'.

¹² Van Hamel 1931a, 55: 'die tot isolement gedoemd waren'.

¹³ Van Hamel 1931a, 55: 'Een bijzondere bekoering had de plechtigheid bij Liskeard, toen de aanwezige vice-presidenten van het congres en Prof. Vinaver door den "Gorsedd" der Barden van Cornwall tot "Honorary Bards" werden gewijd. De barden in hun blauwe gewaden riepen ons bij



▲ Fig. 1. Attendees of the first International Arthurian Congress, Truro (Cornwall), 1930. Van Hamel, wearing glasses and with balding head, is standing seventh from the left. Second from the left is the American medievalist and Arthurian scholar Roger Sherman Loomis (1887-1966), fourth and sixth from the left are the married couple Katharine (1853-1936) and Henry Jenner (1848-1934), advocates for the revival of the Cornish language, and to Van Hamel's right, wearing a black suit and tie, we find the Russian-British scholar Eugene Vinaver (1899-1979), founder of the Arthurian Society in Oxford (in 1928) and the journal *Medium Aevum*. Source: http://www.internationalarthuriansociety.com/images/uploads/web-images/Truro_1930_photo_1_copy.jpg (accessed on 28-3-2023).

It was during this congress that a plan was conceived to establish a society for all those engaged in Arthurian scholarship. The International Arthurian Society still exists, although it was not formally established at the subsequent congress in Quimper, Brittany, in 1933, but this was in fact delayed until 1948.

Torec

Van Hamel published his first full article devoted to an Arthurian romance in 1916 on the *Torec*. This is a Middle Dutch Arthurian tale, the origins of which are unclear. It may be a translation of a lost Old French text. Others maintain that the text is a combination of several different texts, including the Old French *Torrez chevalier au Cercle d'or*.¹⁴ In his contribution, Van Hamel does not discuss the entire text, but focuses on a side story concerning the knight Melions and Raguel.¹⁵ This narrative is, in Van Hamel's view, indebted to folk tales, and 'fundamentally comprises naught but a very familiar fairy tale motif'.¹⁶

Melions is looking for a kidnapped princess. After a journey, he finds her in a cave along with several other abducted women. Melions kills their captor, but is then betrayed by Raguel, who leaves him behind in the cave. Raguel runs off with the princess. It all comes right in the end: Melions is freed from the cave, is recognised at the princess' court as the real hero, and marries the princess. The traitor is killed.

Van Hamel argues that the text may go back to a typical Celtic tale, and that this tale made its way through Brittany into an Old French text, which inspired the *Torec* in turn. Reading an article that is over a hundred years old, one gets an idea of the way in which scholars operated back then. The article is founded on an insight of the scholar, who then develops the idea and frequently constructs a line of thought without substantiating it with supporting arguments. An example of this may be found in the following passage:

onzen bardischen naam op en leidden ons, na het bardisch offer, voor den Chief Bard, in wiens handen wij de gelofte aflegden, om daarna het omringende publiek toe te spreken. Bij het einde der plechtigheid was het ons vergund mede het zwaard van koning Arthur aan te raken'.

¹⁴ See Besamusca 2011 for an overview that includes a discussion of Van Hamel's contribution on the subject.

¹⁵ Van Hamel 1916a.

¹⁶ Van Hamel 1916a, 245: 'bevat in den grond niets anders dan een heel bekend sprookjesmotief'. The underlying type is a variant of a folk tale called 'The three stolen princesses' (ATU 301). ATU is short for Aarne-Thompson-Uther. Anntti Aarne was the first to provide an overview of these types (published in 1910), supplemented and translated into English by Stith Thompson (in 1928). See Uther 2004 for the latest overview of types of folktales.



◀ Fig. 2. Gorsedh Kernow, Killibury, Egloshayle, Cornwall, 1936. Source: Alamy, Image ID: 2H2HA7F.

The Torec poet happened upon the literary Raguel-Melions history, which can only have existed in the form of a short story or poem. In that short form, the adaptation may have been Anglo-Norman, Cornish or Breton. However, how did the creator of that short adaptation create this work of art? Did he add a chivalric-literary prehistory to [...] a folk tale? In general, that was not the preferred method of chivalric fabulators. It was, I believe, not their habit to use a story that was popular among the rural population, whose hero had no name, that existed only in an entirely popular form, for their knightly adventures.¹⁷

I would like to stress at this point that it was not uncommon to arrive at hypotheses in this way, by freely philosophising as one might now say, in the early twentieth century. The study of literature was yet to be firmly established and the main focus was on editing stories. Van Hamel was the first to devote a full publication to *Torec* and uncover a structure in it, which, in a more abstract form, is well known.

Over the decades, scholarly practices have changed. Naturally, a question or impression remains the starting point. Then – if done properly – the arguments for and against are presented, while continually attempting to keep matters as objective and verifiable as possible. The article on *Torec* is an example of ‘the old school’.

Tristan’s fight with the dragon

In this 1924 publication, Van Hamel looks for folk tales that may have inspired the story of Tristan.¹⁸ He notes similarities in various texts, but he also finds differences. This article is clearly exploratory in nature and is not cited in later scholarship.

The Grail

In 1930, an article by Van Hamel was published in the journal *Revue celtique*, in which he discussed the potential for a Celtic origin underlying the famous Grail motif in the Arthurian romances.¹⁹ Chrétien de Troyes was the first to write a Grail romance (*Roman de Perceval*, c. 1190), which inspired a great many variations. After a discussion in which the various proponents and detractors of a Celtic origin of the story are considered, Van Hamel goes on to search for similarities between older Irish tales and the Grail story. In this article, he is the first to point out that there is an Irish story that shares some key elements with the Grail romances: the chosen hero, the quest for some kind of Grail, the Fisher King, the perilous seat. That Irish tale is *Altromh tighi dá medar* (also: *Altram tige dá mheader* (‘The raising of the house of two cups’)) with Eithne as its protagonist. However, no connection can be found between Eithne and the Grail legend. Van Hamel suggests that Perceval’s legend ‘simply arose from the same atmosphere as that of Eithne’. Van Hamel’s suggestion, however, did not catch on.²⁰

¹⁷ Van Hamel 1916a, 248: ‘Den Torec-dichter viel de litteraire Raguel-Melions-geschiedenis in handen, die slechts in den vorm van een kort verhaal of gedicht bestaan kan hebben. In dien korten vorm kan de bewerking Anglonormandisch, Cornisch of Bretonsch geweest zijn. Hoe bracht echter de maker van die korte bewerking zijn kunstwerk tot stand? Plaatste hij een ridderlijk-litteraire voorgeschiedenis voor [...] een volksvertelsel? In het algemeen was dat niet de werkmethode dier ridderlijke fabulators. Het lag, meen ik, niet in hun gewoonte, een vertelsel dat onder de landelijke bevolking leefde, waarvan de held geen naam had, dat slechts in een volstrekt populair vorm bestond, voor hun ridderavonturen te gebruiken’.

¹⁸ Van Hamel 1924b.

¹⁹ Van Hamel 1930a.

²⁰ See Best 1945-1948, 26, where Van Hamel’s contribution was deemed ‘interesting’. Van Hamel still lectured on the Grail and Arthur in 1937-1938 and 1942-1943, see UBU, Archief Van Hamel, G 5B.

Arthur's historicity

A recurring theme in both scholarly circles and certainly also among the general public is the question of Arthur's historicity. Did he genuinely exist in the sixth century, or not? And if he was a historical figure, was he a military leader or a king? That this question invariably sparks fresh debate is due to the fact that there are no surviving contemporary sources. All references to Arthur are from a later period.

In his contribution 'Arthur van Brittannië' ('Arthur of Britain'), Van Hamel discusses Nennius' ninth-century *Historia Brittonum*.²¹ In his history, Nennius merely lists twelve battles allegedly won by Arthur, and offers brief descriptions, such as that Arthur put enemies to flight by carrying the image of Mary on his shoulders.

Van Hamel points out that essentially all sources are of later date. In his view, comments such as the one above about the image of Mary should in fact be taken to indicate that Arthur belongs to legend rather than to history:

But either way, the relevant passage has no value as a source of history, and cannot be used as proof of Arthur's historicity.²²

Van Hamel also points out that someone who should have been a contemporary of Arthur, i.e. Gildas, is silent about Arthur in his *De excidio Britanniae*. Beda also makes no mention of Arthur, which leads Van Hamel to make the following observation:

When we set the worth of the Arthurian [material] handed down by Nennius at its proper value, the silence of two so well-informed authors becomes more eloquent than ever.²³

However, this is not the end of this article. Following this, Van Hamel indicates that there is an even older source than Nennius' account, i.e. the *Gododdin*, written by Aneirin. He proceeds to describe the problems with dating this poet's work. Aneirin is supposed to have lived in the sixth century. Based on surviving copies of his work, one of which is written in a 'far more archaic spelling', Van Hamel concludes that Aneirin's poetry dates from the ninth century at the latest. He is right to ask whether this poetry truly originates in the sixth century, or is a ninth-century forgery. We will overlook

the curious argument that 'a forgery would probably have looked very different', for there is nothing in it 'of the deliberate that tends to characterise the work of a forger'.²⁴ After this, Van Hamel discusses various linguistic aspects of the poems, based on which he concludes that most of them are 'genuine and original'.²⁵ Van Hamel is aware of how much information is lacking when he discusses the edition of Aneirin's work by Ifor Williams (1938).

The three hundred pages of commentary, against sixty pages of text, do not raise the thought of a mismatch. But they do bring to mind inexorably how frighteningly much, both because of the deficiencies in the transmission and because of our incomplete knowledge of this very old language, must remain uncertain and obscure. If ever more light is to fall into this hidden corner of Cymric literature, it must be done by the method adopted by Ifor Williams, i.e. by assembling as many points of evidence as possible for every obscure word and turn of phrase.²⁶

In the *Gododdin*, Arthur's name appears in stanza 102 'though he was not Arthur'. Van Hamel discusses this passage at length. In the end, he argues – based on the tradition that Arthur is immortal – that the words *ceni bei ef arthur* should be understood as 'although he was not immortal'. Van Hamel was the first to offer this explanation. Since his time, much work has been done to improve our understanding of *Y Gododdin*. There is no agreement as to whether the line in which Arthur was mentioned was part of the original work or represents a later addition. As such, the debate on whether Arthur was a historical figure or not remains unresolved. For the purpose of interpreting the meaning of the phrase itself, this is immaterial; Van Hamel's reading of the line stands.

Supervising Maartje Draak

In light of Van Hamel's work in the field of Arthurian studies, it is no surprise that Maartje Draak turned to him when she wished to write her dissertation. Draak had already been in touch with Van Hamel during her studies. It was he who, after she graduated in the spring of 1933, encouraged her to publish part of her thesis comparing the Middle Dutch Arthurian romance *Ferguut* with the older Old French *Fergus*.²⁷ Draak converted her work into two articles and published them. A postcard

²¹ Van Hamel 1943b.

²² Van Hamel 1943b, 220: 'Maar hoe dan ook, waarde als geschiedbron heeft de bewuste passage niet en als bewijs voor de historiciteit van Arthur mag men haar niet gebruiken'.

²³ Van Hamel 1943b, 220: 'Wanneer wij de waarde van de bij Nennius overgeleverde Arthurian op hun juiste waarde schatten, dan wordt dit stilzwijgen van twee zo welingelichte auteurs welsprekender dan ooit'.

²⁴ Van Hamel 1943b, 221: 'een mystificatie er waarschijnlijk heel anders uitgezien zou hebben' and 'van het opzettelijke dat het werk van een vervalser pleegt te kenmerken'.

²⁵ Van Hamel 1943b, 222: 'echt en oorspronkelijk'.

²⁶ Van Hamel 1943b, 223: 'De driehonderd bladzijden commentaar, tegenover zestig bladzijden tekst, wekken niet de gedachte aan een wanverhouding. Maar wel stellen zij ons onverbiddelijk voor de geest, hoe schrikbarend veel, en door het gebrekkige in de overlevering en door onze onvolledige kennis van deze zeer oude taal, onzeker en duister moet blijven. Wanneer eenmaal in deze schuilhoek der Kymrische letterkunde wat meer licht zal vallen, dan moet dat geschieden met behulp van de door Ifor Williams gevolgde methode, d.w.z. door het bijeenbrengen van een zo groot mogelijk aantal bewijspplaatsen voor ieder duister woord en iedere duistere wending'.

²⁷ Draak 1934a and 1934b.

has been preserved among the correspondence between Van Hamel and Draak in which he advised his student to give a lecture at the next Arthurian Congress, to be held in Quimper (Brittany). This card (dated 29 March 1933) showcases Van Hamel's awareness of the fact that much work remained to be done on Middle Dutch Arthurian literature:

It should not be hard to find a subject of modest dimensions from Dutch Arthurian literature about which there is something new to say, by means of a comparison with other sources or otherwise. For the attendees of the congress, the older Dutch literature is, of course, virtually a closed book, so you may count on their interest.²⁸

Maartje Draak's dissertation was on the *Roman van Walewein*. This romance is most probably an original Dutch work; no version of it exist in other languages. In the 1930s, when Draak was working on her dissertation, no reliable edition of this text had yet been published. The study of the text was still in its infancy; in fact, all that Draak investigated under Van Hamel's supervision was groundbreaking. Her student Gerritsen's biography of Draak frames her contribution in the context of the times. Draak was the first to thoroughly investigate the similarity of the narrative structure of the *Roman van Walewein* with fairy tale type ATU 550 and ATU 551. Until then, what scholarship there was, had largely been concerned with finding the sources and origins of the Arthurian tales.

Maartje Draak greatly appreciated her supervisor's guidance. She visited him weekly to 'nag', that is, to discuss any problems she was running into. While she was preparing to defend her dissertation, Van Hamel also advised her to have three theses she was required to add to the work be concerned with Arthurian studies, so that 'you are promoted not just as a celticist, but

also as an Arthurian scholar'. The most notable thing about this statement is, of course, that he regarded a dissertation on a Dutch Arthurian text, which contained not a single word of Celtic, as a proof of competence as a 'celticist'.²⁹

Van Hamel continued to support Draak until his death. He was pleased that Draak received a grant to study manuscripts of Irish Arthurian romances in England and Ireland, and continued to encourage her to study these texts. The Second World War, which prevented Draak from travelling to Ireland or England for the purpose of research as well as from corresponding with her peers, followed by Van Hamel's death in 1945, brought an end to her study of the Irish Arthurian romances, while she did continue researching Middle Dutch Arthurian texts. A manuscript that Draak had completed in 1940 (and discussed with Van Hamel, according to surviving correspondence) was published in 1946. After that, she published only one short article on an Irish Arthurian text. One has to wonder why Draak did not continue working on these remarkable texts after Van Hamel's death. Had she depended on his continued encouragement during their 'nagging' meetings? Or did she consider other work to be more important when she was left behind as the sole remaining Dutch celticist in 1945?

In conclusion

From a modern-day perspective, it is striking how little was known about Arthurian literature at the time. It is therefore all the more admirable how much Van Hamel managed to contribute to the field in his few publications related to Arthurian stories. Nevertheless, his most significant contribution to Arthurian studies must remain his guidance and encouragement of Maartje Draak, who emerged after the war as an outstanding scholar of the Middle Dutch Arthurian romances.



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²⁸ Gerritsen 2019, 66. See also VH to Draak (29-3-1933), UBU, Archief Draak, C 4: 'Het zou U niet moeilyk vallen uit de Nederlandsche Arthur-litteratuur een onderwerp van bescheiden afmetingen te vinden, waarover iets nieuws te zeggen valt, door vergelyking met andere bronnen of anderszins. Voor de congresleden is de oudere Nederlandsche litteratuur natuurlijk vrywel een gesloten boek, zoodat U op belangstelling zoudt kunnen rekenen'.

²⁹ For Van Hamel's role as Draak's supervisor, see Gerritsen 2019, 81-82 (quote on p. 82: 'je je niet alleen als keltiste, maar ook als Arthurian scholar habileert').

A. G. van Hamel's encounters with Breton

PIERRE FAURE

It is fair to say that A. G. van Hamel's scholarly activities in the field of Celtic studies were largely concerned with Irish. Early on in his career, he reached out to Richard Irvine Best on account of his desire to become proficient in Irish, particularly Old Irish.¹ He was also concerned with British Celtic: especially with Welsh material, in which he often managed to make connections with Irish, both on linguistic and literary grounds. For example, his *Inleiding tot de Keltische taal- en letterkunde* ('Introduction to Celtic linguistics and literature') – although the title would seem to suggest a broad scope – focuses mainly on Ireland and Wales.² In the brief linguistic overview at the start of this work, Breton and Cornish are mentioned, but not discussed in great detail. Throughout his career, many of Van Hamel's scholarly publications take a similar approach, referring to Breton and Cornish almost exclusively to provide specific details or context.

And yet, Van Hamel felt a strong attachment to Brittany and Breton. In December 1919, he writes to Best that he has become increasingly interested in 'Breton studies' – what he means by this, I will explain further on – over the past few months and that he marvels at the romantic glow that seems to surround Breton, and its study, in France.³ This romanticism seems to have been contagious: three years later, in 1922, we find Van Hamel in Morlaix, where he tells Best that he tries to speak Breton as much as possible. He also lets him know that he is finding it a lot easier to learn Breton than Irish: 'Irish, in fact, is ten times worse!'⁴ Van Hamel's trip to Brittany is attested to by the French celticist Joseph Vendryes in an obituary; unfortunately, further details of this trip to Brittany are lacking.⁵ Judging by Van Hamel's activities in both the years before and after, the visit seems to have left a major impression on him: between 1920 and 1925, Van Hamel authors as many as six articles on Brittany and the Breton language. For a specialist of Irish, this is considerable.

The first of these publications appears in 1920, by way of an article entitled 'Herleefd Bretagne' ('Brittany revived'), in which he compares the histories of oppression of Ireland and Brittany, arguing that the 'struggle of the Irish is well known, of that of the Bretons one hears less'.⁶ Why is that? According to Van Hamel, it is due to the relatively impoverished culture of the Bretons compared to that of the Irish: whereas the Irish were able to build their separatist movement based on stark religious differences with the English and a wealth of (medieval) literature, the Bretons are said to possess a far less refined culture that was no match for the French. In addition, he also did not see Breton as *zuiver* ('purely') Celtic; the 'typically Celtic literary genres' such as epic prose, bardic poetry, poetic historiography, and genealogies were missing.⁷ His views on Breton literature cannot be summed up better than by the following quote from the aforementioned article:

Given that Breton literature holds no further significance for the study of Celtic in general, it has found few practitioners outside the sons of that country. That it can nevertheless captivate the attention of a stranger for a moment with its literature, Brittany owes exclusively to its nineteenth- and twentieth-century poetry.⁸

This attitude towards Breton literature explains a lot. First of all, it explains why Van Hamel does not take Breton as seriously as Irish and Welsh (while some of his contemporaries, such as Joseph Vendryes, do). Secondly, it explains why Van Hamel's publications on Breton deal exclusively with the modern period, and not the medieval era: given that Old and Middle Irish and Middle Welsh both boast an impressive medieval literature, Celtic medieval studies has no use for 'inferior' Middle Breton. Only the modern period is of any interest, for there at least *something* is going on.

1 See the contribution by Nike Stam in this volume.

2 Van Hamel 1917a.

3 VH to R. I. Best (23-12-1919), NLI.

4 VH to R. I. Best (20-5-1922), NLI. In a later letter, VH to R. I. Best (15-2-1924), NLI, he writes that, having become a professor in Utrecht, he must improve his Irish so that it is at least on par with his Welsh and Breton. He seems to be referring to Modern Irish here.

5 Vendryes 1949. It may have been during this visit that Van Hamel decided to subscribe to the (short-lived) magazine *Buhez Breiz: revue bilingue d'action Bretonne*.

6 Van Hamel 1920c: '[d]e strijd der Ieren is bekend, van dien der Bretons hoort men minder'.

7 Van Hamel 1920c: 'typisch Keltische literaire genres'.

8 Van Hamel 1920c: 'Daar de Bretonsche letterkunde voor de studie van het Keltisch in het algemeen geen verdere beteekenis heeft, heeft zij buiten de zonen van het land zelf maar weinig beoefenaars gevonden. Dat het de aandacht van den vreemdeling toch een oogenblik met zijn letterkunde boeien kan, heeft Bretagne uitsluitend te danken aan zijn poëzie van de negentiende en twintigste eeuw'.



◀ Fig. 1. Breton journals, Utrecht, University Library, Collectie Van Hamel (photo: Bart Jaski).

Van Hamel's main area of interest was Breton poetry: he possessed a number of collections and published two short articles on Breton poets.⁹ Still, his Breton library consisted of more than just collections of poetry. Also included are children's books such as *Prinsezig an dour* ('The water princess') published in 1927, and *Nijadenn an aotrou Skañvig* ('The flight of Mr. Skañvig') dating from 1929, both translations of books by the Dutch author and illustrator Gerrit Rotman.

There are also collections of Breton-language short stories of a higher standard. These volumes in turn often contain poetry. Apart from these, his collection includes a large number of dictionaries of Old Breton, Middle Breton, and both Standard and Vannetais Breton, as well as books – in both French and Breton – dealing with Breton culture and history, such as, for instance, a book on the 'Celtic' (i.e. mainly Breton) theatre by Anatole le Braz.

To this we can add one more book, and a little story: in his edition of the *Colloquia et dictionariolum* (a popular sixteenth-century book), René Verdeyen thanks Van Hamel for lending him his copy of Joseph Loth's *Chrestomathie bretonne*, a compilation of all manner of Breton (but also Cornish and Welsh) texts from the medieval and early modern periods. The latter had become increasingly

rare since 1890 – you can hear Verdeyen breathe a sigh of relief – and yet it seems that Van Hamel was in no hurry to recover this rare Breton book. We only know of this exchange thanks to a single note in Verdeyen's work: the *Chrestomathie bretonne* is still missing from Van Hamel's collection.¹⁰

Especially telling is Van Hamel's review of *Sketla Segobrani*, a long and complicated novel in three parts. He was again attracted by the romanticism that permeates the book; it describes a pseudo-history of the Celts, which has little to do with the factual history of Brittany.¹¹ (He also writes a review on the factual history of Brittany: there, too, he praises Brittany exclusively for its poets and artists).¹² In passing, Van Hamel intimates that Breton is a language that generally does not meet 'the standards of our time'; but the language of *Sketla Segobrani* comes pretty close.

This review was published in 1925, meaning that, in just six years and in spite of his focus on Irish, Van Hamel had mastered Breton to the point where he was able to read and comprehend this lengthy book and write a review about it which analyses its storylines, underlying motifs, and overall message. And – as far as we know – without having been in extensive contact with even a single Breton colleague. This is admirable.

⁹ Van Hamel 1922a and 1924c.

¹⁰ Verdeyen 1935, vol. 3, xii.

¹¹ Van Hamel 1925d.

¹² Van Hamel 1924d, review of Danio 1923.



► Fig. 2. Breton books from Van Hamel's library. UBU 18.67 bre 42.18 *1927tr and 18.67 bre 42.18 *1929rn.

This seems to mark the end of Van Hamel's activities on Breton: he published no more on Breton after this review. He became a professor in 1923, and does not seem to have concerned himself with Breton in this capacity: there are no known lecture notes to suggest that he taught Breton, and there are hardly any references to Breton in his surviving records.

It is Van Hamel's student Theodor Chotzen who was to be the next standard-bearer of Breton in the Low Countries: he specialised in British Celtic, and within that field in Arthurian tales, in the poetry of the Welsh poet Dafydd ap Gwilym, and – of particular concern to us in the present context – in Breton theatre.¹³ During

his military training, for instance, he was working on a Breton text, the *Tragedien Sant Guilherm*, which remains unpublished. Upon the death of both Chotzen and Van Hamel in 1945, Breton passed into obscurity in Dutch Celtic studies: even articles in which Breton is cited only in the context of Welsh appear but occasionally. Publications in and about Breton are almost exclusively confined to Brittany. And yet, thanks to the inexhaustible Jan Deloof, numerous Breton books have been translated into Dutch, and a Dutch-Breton dictionary has even been published. In 2021, at the age of 91, he published a book about his experiences in Brittany and with Breton.¹⁴ The Breton standard is still flying after all.

✎

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¹³ Chotzen 1941 and 1942. On his career and fate, see Toorians and Veelenturf 1993 and <https://adoc.pub/een-keltoloog-taalkundige-en-pacifist-onder-de-wapenen-en-in.html> (accessed on 27-3-2023).

¹⁴ Deloof 2021.

A. G. van Hamel and Old Germanic

ALDERIK BLOM

As is commonly known, at Van Hamel's request, Celtic was added to his brief when he was appointed professor of Old Germanic in Utrecht in 1923, allowing him to devote himself to both of his disciplines, which in his view belonged closely together.¹ Although Van Hamel is better known as a celticist nowadays, he was active in the field of Old Germanic studies – his formal subject as professor and one he mastered as completely as Celtic studies – up to his death in 1945.

Studies and doctorate

Van Hamel started studying Germanic languages early on. At the Amsterdam gymnasium, he benefited from the sound instruction of his teacher of German, Johann Josef Alois Arnold Frantzen (1853-1923), whom he would later succeed as professor in Utrecht and with whom he stayed in touch throughout the years.² Van Hamel subsequently studied *Nederlandsche Letteren* ('Dutch literature'), again in Amsterdam, and specialised in Old Germanic and, as far as was possible at the time, Celtic language and literature.

During his Dutch studies, he had found an inspiring teacher in the field of Old Germanic in Richard Constant Boer (1863-1929).³ Although most of Boer's students were studying Dutch, like Van Hamel himself, Boer had founded the very first *Oudgermaansch Seminarium* ('Old Germanic seminary') in the Netherlands and had also succeeded in establishing the study of the modern Scandinavian languages in the Netherlands. In him, Van Hamel found an admired and beloved teacher, and he considered him to be his 'friend and mentor', as he addressed him during his inaugural address in 1923.⁴ In 1909, he even accompanied his fatherly friend on a study trip to Denmark and Sweden, and to him he owed his predilection for Old Germanic as a favourite subject.⁵ At Boer's instigation, he also studied Danish and Swedish.⁶ While teaching in Middelburg and Rotterdam

and while working as a librarian in The Hague, Boer also kept urging him not to give up on his favourite subject.⁷

R. C. Boer thus merits more than a passing reference. Although he had himself as a student been introduced to historical and Germanic linguistics by his teachers in Leiden, among whom were such Dutch pioneers as Matthias de Vries (1820-1892), Pieter Jacob Cosijn (1840-1899) and Hendrik Kern (1833-1917),⁸ he still had to master Old Norse language and literature more or less on his own. He then obtained his doctorate in Groningen under Barend Sijmonds (1853-1935), who may be considered the first Old Scandinavian specialist in the Netherlands.⁹ After having taught at a gymnasium for 11 years, he was appointed professor in Amsterdam in 1900, and his brief initially encompassed both the Old Germanic languages and Sanskrit. In the later years of his professorship, Boer also succeeded in establishing courses on Danish and Swedish. Although he was generally regarded as a severe and unapproachable person, a small group of students, including Van Hamel, always found him willing to discuss his research and his beloved Danish, Norwegian and Swedish authors. Besides Van Hamel himself, his most important pupils include Van Hamel's renowned fellow Old Germanic scholar Jan P. M. L. de Vries (1890-1964) and Van Hamel's successor and celticist Maartje Draak (1907-1995).¹⁰ Van Hamel's obituary of Boer is remarkably laudatory, and stands in sharp contrast to the much more critical tenor of Jan de Vries, who also mentions Boer's self-imposed isolation in his obituary, as well as his complete break with German scholarship following fierce polemics with, among others, the famous Andreas Heusler.¹¹

In 1911, Van Hamel obtained his doctorate under Boer's supervision for a thesis entitled *De oudste Keltische en Angelsaksische geschiedbronnen* ('The oldest Celtic and Anglo-Saxon historical sources'),¹² in which the Germanic and Celtic focus of his scholarly work was already apparent.

¹ Van Hamel 1938b. On this issue, see Bart Jaski's contribution "'That mad ambition of mine": A. G. van Hamel in Bonn during the First World War' in this volume.

² De Vooy 1945-1946, 231-232.

³ Van Hamel 1929-1930, 8-35.

⁴ Van Hamel 1923b, 35: 'vriend en leermeester'.

⁵ De Vooy 1945-1946, 232.

⁶ Gerritsen 2019, 57. Hammerich 1946, 20-21, confirms that, in addition to Icelandic, Van Hamel also spoke fluent Danish.

⁷ Van Hamel 1923b, 34-35.

⁸ For Matthias de Vries, see Van Bree, Van den Toorn and Van der Wal 1997; for Cosijn, see Bremmer 2004; and for Kern, see Huizinga 1950. Kern had also published on Celtic topics, see Schneiders and Veelenturf 1992, nos. 285-304.

⁹ De Wilde 2007.

¹⁰ Gerritsen 2019, 42.

¹¹ De Vries 1930, 16; cf. Voorwinden 1998.

¹² Van Hamel 1911b.

Utrecht, 2 Juni 1911

Amice,

Tot mijn grooten spijt kan ik
 weder, vandaag niet, zooals mijn
 voornemen was, bij Uwe promotie
 aanwezig zijn. Ik moet te dees
 schriftelyk mijn dank betuygen, van
 de toezending Uwer defterlatie }
 mijn geelkweersch brengt, met de
 zoo eevolle beëindiging van Uwe
 academische loopbaan. Ik mag

► Fig. 1. Brief note from prof. Frantzen (2-6-1911) expressing his regrets that he could not be present at Van Hamel's conferring ceremony. The Hague, Nationaal Archief, 2.21.081 (Archief van J.A. van Hamel), no. 301.

Bonn and Utrecht

Following several unsuccessful applications, Van Hamel was employed as a professor of Dutch and Low German in Bonn from 1915 to 1917, although he ended up teaching there for only three semesters. He gave lectures on Gothic, Old Saxon, Middle Dutch poetry and Joost van den Vondel. The Low German element of his brief was thus somewhat neglected, and he also left the lectures on modern Dutch literature to a *Lektor*.¹³ In 1923, he was finally appointed professor of Old Germanic at Utrecht University.¹⁴ Although he was considered the successor of his former teacher Frantzen, he did not continue the latter's focus on modern German. Van Hamel's chair was thus established as being concerned with 'the principles of comparative Germanic linguistics and the ancient languages and literatures of the Germanic peoples'.¹⁵

A glance at the lecture notes from the time of his professorship gives a good impression of the wide range of topics that Van Hamel managed to cover in his teaching. From introductions to Old Germanic literature and culture to religion and mythology, and from general linguistics to the historical grammar of Gothic, runes, Old Norse, Old English, Middle High German and Dutch. Most of his lecture notes, however, relate to specific texts, many of

which also feature in his publications: mostly Eddic and occasionally skaldic poetry, as well as the Old English *Beowulf* and classics of the Middle High German *Blütezeit* such as *Der arme Heinrich*, *Parzival*, and a selection of poems by Walther von der Vogelweide – incidentally, he taught the latter in German instead of Dutch.¹⁶ The latter notwithstanding, it is clear that Van Hamel was of lesser, or perhaps even no, significance for the practice of German language and literature in Utrecht. Indeed, his interest in Old Germanic and Celtic studies was far greater than in High German language and literature.¹⁷

After his sudden death, his successors came and went in quick succession, which was certainly detrimental to the practice of Old Germanic studies in Utrecht. Already in 1946, the Dane Louis Leonor Hammerich (1892-1975),¹⁸ a good friend of Van Hamel's, was appointed, but he resigned after just one year, and after him, the Swiss Heinrich Wagner (1923-1988) – certainly not unknown to celticists – only stayed on for a few years himself, most of which he spent in Ireland.¹⁹

Near and distant colleagues

As mentioned, Jan de Vries, like Van Hamel, had studied Dutch and Old Germanic at the University of Amsterdam.

¹³ Grave 2018, 42. Also based on information provided by Jaap Grave from the fourth chapter 'Bonn nach Franck: Van Hamel und Frings' of his unfinished study on the history of Dutch studies in Germany. I thank dr. Grave for his willingness to share his findings with me.

¹⁴ Vonk 2009, 43-44.

¹⁵ Vonk en Peeters 2007, 89: 'de beginselen der vergelijkende Germaansche taalwetenschap en de oude talen en letterkunde der Germaansche volken'.

¹⁶ Utrecht, University Library, Hs. 11 D 20-21 (lecture notes by Van Hamel).

¹⁷ Vonk en Peeters 2007, 91.

¹⁸ Cf. Draak 1975.

¹⁹ Mac Mathúna 1989.



◀ Fig. 2. Medal of the linguistics congress in Copenhagen, 1936. The Hague, Nationaal Archief, 2.21.081 (Archief van J.A. van Hamel), no. 300.

He had obtained his doctorate in 1915, also supervised by Boer, and in the years that followed he too had to make his living as a teacher of Dutch at first, in his case at the HBS (*Hogereburgerschool*, 'higher civic school') in Arnhem. De Vries also had hopes for the Utrecht professorship, but ended up in second place.²⁰ It is quite possible that the two scholars had already grown somewhat wary of one another by then: for instance, De Vries explicitly called Van Hamel 'his [Boers'] pupil' on several occasions.²¹ In spite of the fact that both men may be considered the most prominent Dutch figures in the field of Old Germanic studies in the 1930s, the two barely interacted with one another; moreover, the turbulent political developments of their time placed them on completely opposite sides. De Vries' problematic attitude towards the occupying forces,²² his collaboration during the war and his eventual flight to Germany in 1944 at the advance of the Allies²³ are criticised by Van Hamel in no uncertain terms in one of his last letters, written shortly before his death to his Icelandic colleague Alexander Jóhannesson: De Vries was 'a traitor in exile. He can never return here'.²⁴

The international regard and esteem in which Van Hamel was held is evident not only from his contributions to *Festschriften* in honour of famous scholars like Holger Pedersen and Ernst Albin Kock,²⁵ but also from what remains of his correspondence, although the latter is, unfortunately, extremely limited in this regard. Nevertheless, a close friendship existed between Van Hamel

and his Danish colleague Hammerich and his wife Clara Flensburg, who translated Dutch and Flemish literature into Danish. From early on, this couple had a special connection with the Netherlands and were committed to promoting exchanges between the two countries, both in a purely academic sense and in a broader cultural sense. Indeed, in their joint memoirs, a full chapter is devoted to 'Ton van Hamel', recounting how the couple met him in Utrecht during a scholarly visit to the Netherlands in 1925, how he subsequently visited Denmark regularly, sometimes on his way home from elsewhere, but also on family occasions, such as at the engagement of one of their children.²⁶

However, only a single letter from Clara is preserved in the archives, inviting Van Hamel, whom she had not been able to visit during the war, to Denmark for Christmas 1945.²⁷ Sadly, Van Hamel would not live to see the end of the year and, as mentioned, Hammerich would even succeed Van Hamel in Utrecht in 1946, if only for a year, with the same brief of Old Germanic. In his own oration, Hammerich nevertheless devoted a few moving lines to his friendship with Van Hamel.²⁸

His published works: character and method

Van Hamel's published works in Old Germanic studies cover the entire range of the field as it was at the time, i.e. all the relevant languages and literatures. Nevertheless, it is, of course, possible to identify recurrent themes and distinctive approaches.

²⁰ Vonk and Peeters 2007, 68; Henkes 2005, 140.

²¹ De Vries 1930, 3, 17: 'zijn leerling'.

²² For Jan de Vries' controversial career see also, besides Henkes 2000 and 2005, the different approach taken by Kylstra 1999 and 2014, as well as Smidt 2007.

²³ Henkes 2000, 62-94.

²⁴ Quak 2018, 372: 'een verrader in ballingschap. Naar hier kan hij nooit terugkeren'.

²⁵ Van Hamel 1934a and 1937a.

²⁶ Hammerich and Flensburg 1973, 74-77.

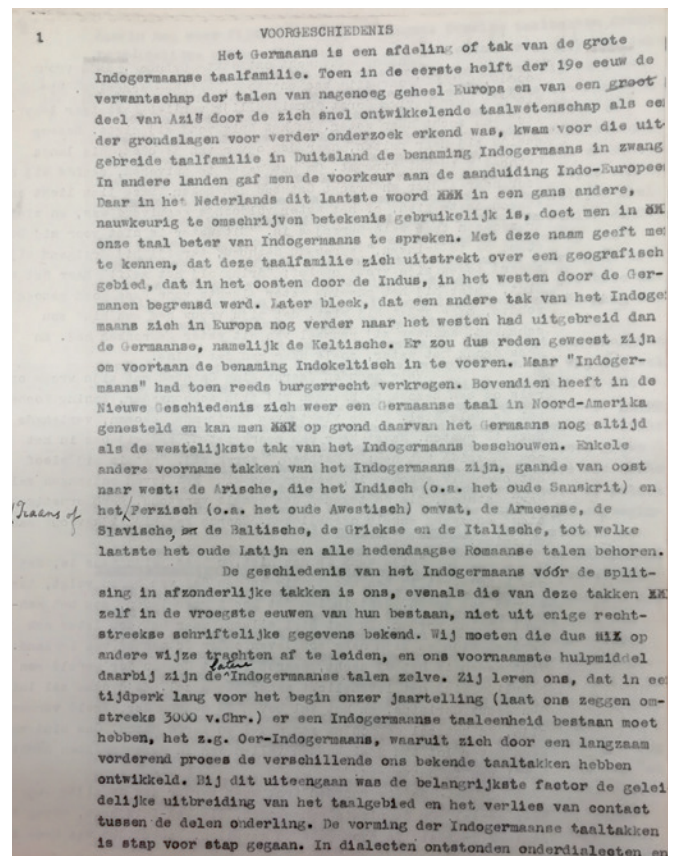
²⁷ Clara Hammerich to VH (19-11-1945), NA, 297.

²⁸ Hammerich 1946, 20: 'Grote weemoed vervult mij bij de gedachte, dat ik de plaats zal innemen van A. G. van Hamel. Natuurlijk ben ik blij en trots dit te mogen doen. Meer nog denk ik met ontzag aan zijn geleerdheid, zijn uitgebreide kennis; ik kan nooit zo veel geven als hij heeft gegeven. Maar het overheersend gevoel bij de gedachte aan A. G. van Hamel is rouw. Wij, zijn vrienden, kunnen hem niet vergeten; na zijn heengaan is er iets leegs in ons; ja, wij willen eigenlijk in onze binnenste ziel niet toegeven, dat hij dood is: in onze gedachtenwereld leeft hij nog altijd' ('Great sorrow fills me at the thought that I shall take the place of A. G. van Hamel. Of course, I am happy and proud to do so. But more than that, I think with awe of his great scholarship, his extensive knowledge; I can never give as much as he has given. But the overriding feeling when thinking of A. G. van Hamel is grief. We, his friends, cannot forget him; after his passing there is an emptiness inside of us; yes, we do not actually want to admit in our innermost souls, that he is dead: in our minds he yet lives').

For instance, only a few of Van Hamel's Old Germanic publications are of a strictly linguistic nature, and moreover, they generally date from the beginning of his career and before he obtained his professorship in Utrecht, although he continued to cover this material in his lectures. Following the publication of several intricate and detailed studies on the historical morphology of Gothic,²⁹ and the production of a substantial general survey of this language – the twice-reprinted *Gotisch handboek* ('Gothic handbook')³⁰ – Van Hamel did not pursue this topic any further. Van Hamel also seems to have had an excellent command of the historical phonology and morphology of languages such as Old Saxon, Middle Low German and Middle Dutch, as demonstrated by his article on 'Anlautendes v' – a tour de force that even cites forms from Low German and English dialects for comparative purposes.³¹ But in this area, too, he barely registers from the early 1920s onwards. Clearly, then, he preferred less specifically linguistic topics.

By contrast, a larger group of articles clearly build on the theme of his dissertation: early medieval (pseudo-) historical literature in both the Insular Celtic and Old Germanic languages. A superb example of Van Hamel's skill in this area is his 1931 study 'On Ari's chronology', which deals with the traditional dating of the settlement of Iceland, which, according to Ari Þorgilsson (1068-1148, also called Ari *inn fróði* ('the scholar')), is said to have taken place during the reign of Harald Fairhair, king of Norway. The difficulty lay in the precise dating of the battle of Hafsfjord, which had already puzzled such luminaries as Halvdan Koht and Finnur Jónsson. However, using Anglo-Saxon sources, Van Hamel shows that the error originated with Ari, whose assumption that the battle had been the direct cause of the exodus to Iceland had led to miscalculations in the chronology of the settlement.³² It is worth noting that Van Hamel regularly relates his knowledge of Celtic sources to problems in Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon historiography.

On the other hand, a number of his contributions are entirely philological in nature, such as, for instance, 'The saga of Sorli the Strong', in which Van Hamel reconstructs the events of a lost saga on the basis of fragments preserved in surviving texts.³³ This philological disposition seems to be a hallmark of Van Hamel. He likes to highlight a problematic passage, or even a single obscure word, from an Eddic poem or saga in order to then explain its meaning by means of a comparative *tour d'horizon*. Although Van Hamel usually focuses on medieval Old Norse literature, he often draws on his expertise in later Icelandic literature and Celtic studies, as well as the folklore of various other Nordic cultures, such as



▲ Fig. 3. Typescript of the unpublished book *Het Germaans* door Prof. Dr. A. G. van Hamel, professor aan de Rijksuniversiteit te Utrecht, p. 1 of a total of 64 pp. The Hague, Nationaal Archief, 2.21.081 (Archief van J.A. van Hamel), no. 303.

Finnish or Estonian.³⁴ In this way, Van Hamel likes to clarify ambiguities, such as the location of the well of wisdom at the roots of the world tree Yggdrasil, or the golden game of the gods, both described in *Völuspá*; but also, for example, the way in which the god Óðinn obtained the runes (in *Hávamál*) and the mead of poetry (in *Skáldskaparmál*); or the meaning of the enigmatic word *gambanteinn*.³⁵

Finally, Van Hamel's publications aimed at a wider, Dutch-speaking audience should be mentioned. According to his colleague and friend, the scholar of Dutch Cornelis G. N. de Vooyo (1873-1955), publications such as *Iceland: old and new* from 1933, a book that is still very much worth reading, showcase 'the artistic disposition of the author, who until the final years of his life felt the desire to make many readers partake in what was close to his heart'.³⁶ Hence perhaps also

²⁹ Van Hamel 1916b.

³⁰ Van Hamel 1923c.

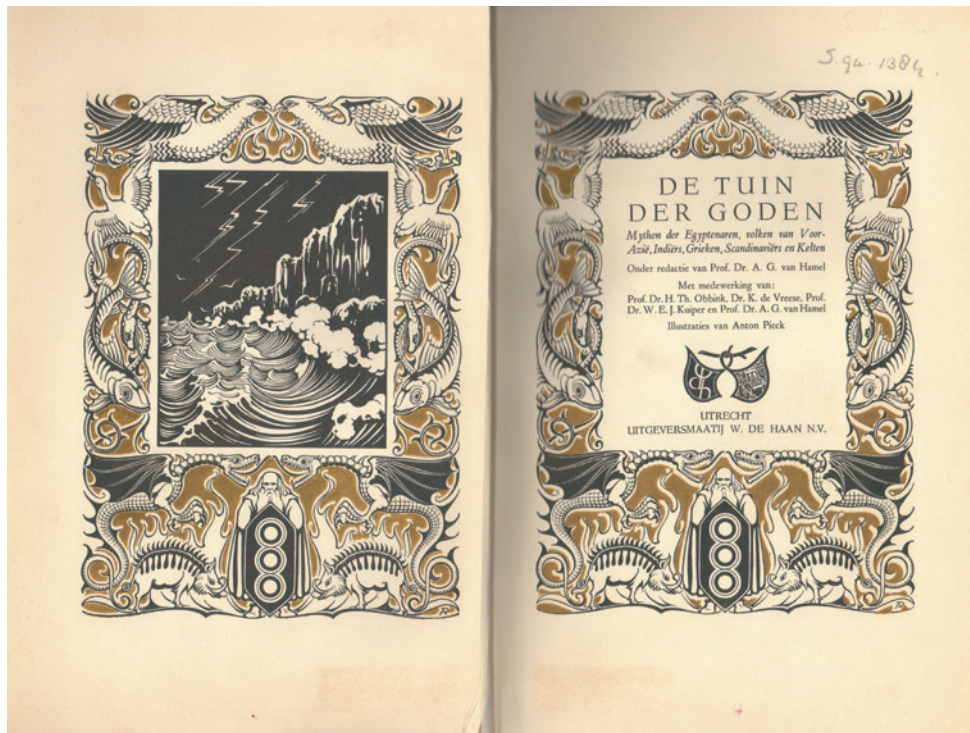
³¹ Van Hamel 1918b.

³² Van Hamel 1931d, 214.

³³ Van Hamel 1935-1936.

³⁴ For the former, see, for instance, Van Hamel 1933d, 350-395; for the latter, for instance, Van Hamel 1943d.

³⁵ Van Hamel 1925h and 1934b; 1932-1933 and 1934a; 1932c.



◀ Fig. 4. Title page of the anthology *De tuin der goden, deel I: mythen der Egyptenaren, volken van Voor-Azië, Indiërs, Grieken, Scandinaviërs en Kelten* (Utrecht 1940), edited by Van Hamel, and illustrated by Anton Pieck. The second volume was published posthumously in 1947. UBU, S qu 1384.

his contributions to popular anthologies such as *De tuin der goden* ('The garden of the gods'), published in 1940, which features retellings of the myths of various peoples, and in which he had been responsible for the section on Scandinavian mythology,³⁷ or his preface to the anthology of Norwegian fairy tales, published one year later, with translations from Asbjørnsen's and Moe's famous collection.³⁸ According to Maartje Draak, Van Hamel was still working on other, popularising editions before his death, mentioning titles such as 'Uit de wereld der Edda' ('From the world of the Edda') (Amsterdam), 'IJslandse letterkunde' ('Icelandic literature') (The Hague) and 'Het Germaans' ('Germanic') (The Hague). Outlines for these can be found in Van Hamel's archives.³⁹

Some recurring themes

Van Hamel speaks out strongly several times against the mainly German tendency to consider Icelandic literature to be primarily 'Old Germanic', in order to compensate for the large gaps in the early continental traditions.⁴⁰ In his view, medieval Icelandic literature should be regarded first of all as Icelandic, only partly as Old Scandinavian, and only exceptionally and with extreme caution as 'Old Germanic'. Already in his inaugural address, he had emphasised the diversity and major differences

that exist between the various surviving Old Germanic literatures, albeit without denying the existence of a common core.⁴¹

This position is also strongly expressed in his 1929 article 'On *Vølundarkviða*'. Although Van Hamel, in this study of a poem from the Edda, attempts to reconstruct the events of the original story of Wayland (Old Norse: *Vølundr*) the Smith by using material from West Germanic languages such as the Old English poems *Widsiþ* and *Deor* for comparison, he again strongly emphasises that Old Norse poetry can ultimately only be compared to itself. According to him, Eddic poetry, especially in the case of *Vølundarkviða*, was more of a popular and lyrical genre, while the poorly attested epic poetry in the West Germanic languages was almost entirely aristocratic in nature.

This strong distinction between 'aristocratic' and 'popular' poetry was a second favourite of Van Hamel's, which he revisited in detail in his review of a recently published edition of *Vanden leveve Ons Heren*, a Middle Dutch text dating back to around 1250.⁴² Van Hamel proposes to retrace the indigenous 'Germanic' roots of the language and narrative style of this account of the

³⁶ De Vooy's 1945-1946, 5-6: 'de kunstzinnige aanleg van de auteur, die tot in zijn laatste levensjaren lust gevoelt om veel lezers te doen delen in wat hem zelf ter harte gaat'.

³⁷ Van Hamel 1940a.

³⁸ Van Hamel 1941c.

³⁹ Draak 1947, 80. NA, 303, contains a typescript of the publication 'Het Germaans' comprising 64 pages (1942 or later); NA, 304, and UBU, Archief Van Hamel, H 5, contain typescripts of the publication on Iceland comprising 63 or 30 pages (excluding bibliography and registers; 1939 or later). There is no typescript on the Edda, but UBU, Archief Van Hamel, G 6G, contains documents on a course on the Edda that Van Hamel gave for the Volksuniversiteit in 1944.

⁴⁰ Van Hamel 1931g.

⁴¹ Van Hamel 1923b, 23, 29.

⁴² Van Hamel 1930i.

life and death of Jesus Christ, as had already been done for *Van den vos Reynaerde*. He then does so, using his extensive arsenal of comparative material to establish that the style of this text is quite different from that of, say, the Old Saxon *Heliand* of the ninth century, which also recounts the life of Christ. Van Hamel argues that the *gevoelstoon* ('sentiment') in *Vanden levene*, instead, has much more in common with that of the Old High German *Evangelienbuch* of Otfried of Weissenburg from the Carolingian era. Once again, Van Hamel proclaims his conviction that the *Oudgermaanse epiek* ('Old Germanic epic'), referring to the Old High German *Hildebrandslied* and similar Old English poems, had always employed an elitist, aristocratic style, which, moreover, had been lost with the disappearance of the original warrior caste. Conversely, Van Hamel considers the *volksere* ('more popular') quality of Otfried, as well as of the Old High German *Ludwigslied* and *Georgslied*, and also *Vanden levene*, to be less cultivated and class-specific. He calls this the 'Frankish style', which he held to have had a much longer existence than the strict, 'Saxon', or aristocratic style with its roots in the Migration Period. According to Van Hamel, something similar must apply to the more lyrical, 'popular' Eddic poems like *Vǫlundarkviða*.

Finally, a substantial set of contributions from the 1930s concerns questions relating to the history of religion, an area in which Dutch scholars such as Gerardus van der Leeuw, Claas Jouco Bleeker (1898-1983) and Jan de Vries played a leading part internationally during the interwar period,⁴³ and in which Van Hamel would also remain active up to his death. In addition to contributing to general works aimed at a broader audience, such as the aforementioned *Tuin der goden* and Van der Leeuw's wide-ranging *Godsdiensten der wereld* ('Religions of the world'),⁴⁴ he also published a number of specialist studies in this field.⁴⁵ A recurring theme in these articles is Van Hamel's singular take on the concepts of divinity and human destiny as they would have existed among the pagan Celts and Germans. In 1932, for instance, Van Hamel revisited the enigmatic description of how Óðinn obtained the runes in the Eddic poem *Hávamál*.⁴⁶ Unlike others, however, Van Hamel did not consider Óðinn's actions to represent a (self)sacrifice, but rather a kind of martyrdom – exploited by the god as a means to bend magical powers to his will. In order to substantiate his argument, Van Hamel drew partly on parallels from Irish saints' lives, where, he argues, fasting – another form of martyrdom – was still used as 'leverage' to sway both

God and men, in spite of the Christian context. According to Van Hamel, this act reflects a lingering ancient pagan understanding of magic.

In his comparisons between Icelandic and Irish beliefs, Van Hamel repeatedly suggests the idea that the pagan Irish would not have had any gods in the strict sense, but rather believed in abstract 'forces' that could only be influenced by magic. By contrast, Icelandic culture seems to have had a theistic outlook, even though its gods only acted as mediators between (natural) forces and humans. After all, the Icelandic gods are but rarely represented as creators, instead functioning, like humans, entirely within the natural order. However, just as the gods can bend the forces of nature to their will – as in the case of Óðinn – so too can humans, imitating their example by using magic. Only death cannot be cheated, not even by the gods. However, according to Van Hamel, Celtic texts offer no trace of mediating gods. Rather, they testify to a kind of 'magical mechanism', which Van Hamel considered to belong to an earlier stage of culture. As a result, the Celts would have had an entirely fatalistic conception of fate. Although the Germanic tribes would not have been entirely free of this sort of magical thinking either, the ability of their gods to mediate between a man and his fate would have allowed for a certain freedom of the individual, leading to the 'typically Germanic notion of personhood', according to Van Hamel,⁴⁷ where fatalism only applied to death.

While modern scholars of Old Germanic will certainly be inclined to agree with Van Hamel when it comes to his repeated insistence that Old Norse literature should be considered to be primarily Icelandic, the honest truth is that his other theories have hardly been adopted, if at all, by scholars of both his own and of later times: neither as regards his separation between supposedly 'Frankish' and 'Saxon' styles, nor as regards his theories in the field of comparative religious studies. Although a Danish colleague, Vilhelm Grønbech, did ask him to publish more on the latter shortly after the war, this letter did not reach Van Hamel in time.⁴⁸ Tellingly, it was finally answered by Van Hamel's protégée Maartje Draak,⁴⁹ who would be the only one to adopt and elaborate on his ideas on this subject, albeit with a similar lack of recognition by her international peers.⁵⁰

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⁴³ Hofstee 1997 and 2007.

⁴⁴ Van Hamel 1940e.

⁴⁵ Among others Van Hamel 1932-1933, 1935b, 1928-1936a, 1928-1936b.

⁴⁶ Van Hamel 1932-1933.

⁴⁷ UBU, Archief Van Hamel, G 6B, lecture on 'Cultuur en afstamming' ('Culture and descent'): 'typisch-Germaanse persoonlijkheidsprincipe'.

⁴⁸ Torkil Kemp to VH (5-2-1946), UBU, Archief Van Hamel, G 3K. Kemp is a student writing on behalf of professor Grønbech.

⁴⁹ Maartje Draak to Torkil Kemp (11-4-1946), UBU, Collectie Draak, C 1 no. 2.

⁵⁰ Gerritsen 2019, 251-252; Blom 2020, 228-229.

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A. G. van Hamel and Iceland

AREND QUAK

Land of great solitude!
Land that speaks to my soul in the language it understands, that it craves!
Land I have prayed and called for, which has appeared before me like the first moist wind of thaw:
my hardness has melted in you and my rigidity bent.
Land of my quiet evenings, at home in the crowded fullness of houses and people; in the
darkness and seclusion of late hours thou dost permeate my soul!
Land of my heart and my yearning.
Iceland. I see you before me now.¹

A. G. van Hamel uses these lyrical words to describe how, for the second time in his life, he saw Iceland emerge from the sea ahead of him from the ship the *Brúarfoss*.² This must have been in 1929, when he arrived in Djúpi-vogur in eastern Iceland. To prepare for the journey, he had sought advice from, among others, the Icelandic scholar Sigurður Nordal, whom he had met on an earlier trip in 1928.³ After all, travelling to Iceland was quite an undertaking back then. The difficulties and duration of the journey from the Netherlands to Iceland are apparent, for example, from the account given by one A. W. van Dijk, who made this trip in 1932 as a member of a group of male and female students who went to Iceland that year, led by Van Hamel, to help the farmers there take in the hay. They travelled by ship from Rotterdam to Hull, took a train to Edinburgh in Scotland and then boarded a ship to Iceland, again, coincidentally, the ‘*Brúarfoss*’. This was a small Icelandic freighter, which also took passengers. After a three-day voyage – at times accompanied by seasickness! – they finally sighted the coast of Iceland. Van Dijk must have experienced something similar to what Van Hamel described, though he expresses it less dramatically: ‘Fairlylike and unforgettable was the first sight we caught of Iceland. Faintly, hazily, a high rocky coast loomed up and gradually waterfalls and white glaciers became visible, sloping down to sea.’⁴

In 1929, Van Hamel planned to head into the poorly accessible interior of Iceland, which in those days meant travelling by horse and with the aid of a guide. Those horses and guides had to be arranged in advance, as can be seen from the letter to Nordal. Van Hamel also

writes about this in his 1933 book on Iceland, chapter 2 of which offers praise to the Icelandic horse. Later on, in 1937, he expresses his regret that cars have replaced horses in Iceland over the course of a relatively short period of time.

When I first visited Iceland in 1928, there was a small stretch of motorway of over 100 kilometres stretching from the capital Reykjavík out to the East, and in a few other parts of the country, too, there was a section of road here and there from the port town to the adjacent hinterland. This was a novelty at the time. In most regions, one could only travel on horseback. As a stranger, one had to have a guide, in addition to two riding horses a man and one or more pack horses. This was an expensive pursuit, but in return one was awarded with a pleasure that can scarcely be matched. The small Icelandic horses (I have always refused to call them “ponies” as the English do) are wonderful animals. There were no roads then, at best a horse track here and there, and the terrain is very varied: lava fields, deserts of stone or ash, sandy plains, grassy fields, high mountains and steep slopes, and across all this these strong and hardened animals carried the traveller unerringly to his destination. On the flat parts with soft soil, trotting and galloping were a joy. One changed mounts several times a day and could thus cover many kilometres before seeking shelter at a farm in the evening, where you were met with surpassing hospitality. The next day, the journey continued. The rivers never stood in the way. Despite the often tremendously swollen

¹ A. G. van Hamel: ‘Land van groote eenzaamheid! Land dat tot mijn ziel spreekt in de taal, die zij verstaat, waar zij naar hunkert! Land waar ik om gebeden en geroepen heb, en dat voor mij is verschenen als de eerste vochtige dooiwind: mijn hardheid is in u gesmolten en mijn strakheid gebogen. Land van mijn stille avonden, thuis in de volheid van huizen en mensen; in het donker en de geslotenheid der late uren doortrekt gij mijn ziel! Land van mijn hart en mijn smachten. IJsland. Ik zie u nu voor mij’.

² On a postcard to Sigurður Nordal dated 16 July 1929, Van Hamel wrote that he intended to board this ship for *Seyðisfjörður* on 24 July (Quak 2018, 357). The ‘*Brúarfoss*’ had been owned by the Reykjavík-based company Eimskip since 1926.

³ Quak 2018, 356-357.

⁴ Description in *De Standaard*, 8-4-1933: ‘Sprookjesachtig en onvergetelijk was de eerste aanblik, dien IJsland bood. Vaag, omneveld, doemde een hooge rotskust op en langzamerhand werden watervallen en witte gletschers zichtbaar, die naar zee afgleden’.

flow and the surging torrents, the horses always got you through alive, provided you took care not to get scared or dizzy and slip out of the saddle midstream. In such cases, it was important to get a guide from a neighbouring farm, because the greatest danger is posed by the invisible river bed: where it consists of clay or sand, a horse can easily sink into it, and then both rider and horse would be lost. So a man was needed who “knew” the river! But apart from this, one had to give oneself over willingly to one’s horse. [...] I still know some parts of Iceland where roads and bridges have not yet penetrated and that is where I prefer to go. These are the areas where the violent glacial torrents shift so often that roads and bridges would have been instantly swept away. But outside of such regions, nobody travels on horseback anymore, not even the Icelandic farmers. Sure, they have a few riding horses on their farms, but they only use them for local errands, much like we use bicycles. For longer distances, the car is used. In just a decade or so, this huge change in transport has come about, and with it, a tremendous saving in time, effort and money. [...] However, this has also made travel in Iceland less poetic.⁵

Iceland celebrates its 1000th anniversary

In 1930, Van Hamel returned to Iceland. This time to join in the celebrations of the 1000th anniversary of the Icelandic parliament, the Althingi. Already a year earlier, in 1929, Van Hamel had argued strongly for Dutch participation in these celebrations in Reykjavík. The Althingi, being 1000 years old, was in fact the oldest parliament in Europe. To mark the occasion, other parliaments in Europe and beyond had been invited to send representatives. All those invited accepted, except for the Dutch, and this on purely formal grounds. Van Hamel was profoundly dismayed by this and wrote:

One could not enter an Icelandic house this summer [1929] and make oneself known as Dutch, or the question arose, what consideration had determined the

Dutch position on the invitation to Thingvellir. In the year 1930, the founding of the Icelandic Free State a thousand years previously will be commemorated with great solemnity. In the plain of Thingvellir, where in 930 the Icelandic general assembly, the direct precursor of today’s parliament or Althingi in Reykjavik, first convened, a great feast will be celebrated. Leading Icelandic figures will give speeches. Icelandic national arts and sports will be shown. They will demonstrate how their celebrated hospitality lives on among Icelanders today. Guests from many countries are expected. First among these will be the representatives of the parliaments of the Western and Central European states, as well as of North America, which have received an invitation to attend this ceremony. For it was felt that the founding of the oldest living parliament could not be better celebrated than in the presence of representatives of the parliaments of friendly states. This gracious invitation to send representatives was accepted just as graciously by all major powers. By all but one. The Dutch houses of parliament rejected it. Every Icelander is aware of this and has been talking about it. He then adds that ‘the reason they give, is that their laws do not allow them to accept’. However, upon closer inspection, I have learnt that the formal objection stems from the standing orders of our Lower House, which do not allow for external representation.

Leaving idealistic considerations aside – this formalistic attitude is certainly ill-advised. To be the only one to fail to attend an occasion like this has a detrimental effect. Even in Westminster and in Washington, they do not consider a pilgrimage to Thingvellir to be beneath them. The Hague’s high-handed and stiff-headed gesture will certainly not win our country any friends over there. A more flexible attitude would certainly have won them over, and only to our advantage. Because, as the remainder of this essay will show, Iceland is a country where demand is growing rapidly.⁶

⁵ *Leidsch Dagblad*, 30-10-1937; *De Gooi- en Eemlander*, 17-11-1937: ‘Dat was een dure liefhebberij, maar voor zijn geld kreeg men dan ook een genoeg dat nauwelijks te evenaren is. De kleine IJslandsche paarden (ik heb altijd geweigerd ze met de Engelschen „ponies” te noemen) zijn wonderbaarlijke dieren. Er waren toen geen wegen, op zijn hoogst hier en daar een paardenpaadje, en het terrein is zeer afwisselend: lavavelden, steen- of aschwoestijnen, zandvlakten, grazige velden, hooge bergen en steile hellingen, en over dat alles brachten de sterke en geharde dieren den reiziger feilloos naar zijn plaats van bestemming. Over de vlakke gedeelten met zachten bodem was het draven en galopperen een genot. Men wisselde meerdere malen per dag van rijdier en kón zoo vele kilometers afleggen, alvorens men ’s avonds onderdak vroeg in een boerderij, waar de onvolprezen gastvrijheid voor U gereed stond. Den volgenden dag ging het dan weer verder. De rivieren vormden nimmer een beletsel. Ondanks den vaak geweldig gezwollen stroom en de aanbruisende watermassa’s brachten de paarden U er altijd levend door, mits gij er maar voor zorgdet niet bang of duizelig te worden en midden in het water uit het zadel te glijden. Wel was het zaak in zulke gevallen een gids uit een naburige boerderij te halen, want het grootste gevaar levert de onzichtbare bodem van den stroom op: waar die uit klei of zand bestaat, kan een paard licht erin zakken, en dan zouden ruiter en rijdier verloren zijn. Er was dus een man noodig, die de rivier „kende”! Maar afgezien hiervan moest men zich daar willoos aan zijn paard overgeven. [...] Ik weet nog enkele deelen van IJsland, waar de autoweg en de brug nog niet doorgedrongen zijn en daarheen richten zich mijn schreden bij voorkeur. Het zijn die streken, waar het geweld der gletscherstroomen zich zoo vaak verplaatst, dat wegen en bruggen toch onmiddellijk weer weggeslagen zouden zijn. Maar afgezien van zulke streken reist niemand meer te paard, zelfs de IJslandsche boeren niet. Zeker, zij hebben een aantal rijpaarden op de boerderij, maar gebruiken die alleen voor boodschappen in de buurt, ongeveer zooals wij een fiets gebruiken. Voor grooter afstanden wordt de auto aangezet. In een tiental jaren is deze reusachtige verandering in het verkeerswezen gekomen, en daarmee is een geweldige besparing van tijd, kracht en geld verkregen. [...] ‘t Reizen op IJsland is daardoor wel minder poëtisch geworden’. See also Van Hamel 1937b.

⁶ Van Hamel, ‘IJslandsche indrukken’, *NRC*, 8-10-1929: ‘Men kon in dezen zomer [1929] geen IJslandsch huis binnengaan en zich als Nederlander bekend maken, of de vraag was, welke overweging de Nederlandsche houding in zake de uitnoodiging naar Thingvellir had bepaald. In het jaar 1930 zal met groote plechtigheid de stichting van den IJslandschen Vrijstaat voor duizend jaar herdacht worden. In de vlakke van Thingvellir, waar in 930 voor het eerst de IJslandsche volksvergadering, directe voorzaat van het tegenwoordige parlement of Althingi te Reykjavik, bijeenkwam, zal dan een grootsch feest gevierd worden. Voormannen uit het IJslandsche publieke leven zullen daar redevoeringen houden. Men zal er de

Van Hamel revisits the matter later on, this time prompted by a lengthy report on the festivities at Thingvellir in the *Algemeen Handelsblad* of 8 July 1930. In it, the reporter of that newspaper mentions that the representative of the Netherlands was met with great applause:

After mr. Knottenbelt, who was to speak on behalf of the Dutch houses of parliament, was announced and the Dutch flag was flown, an especially warm applause broke out. I do not know to what this should be attributed. Apparently, the Dutch name still has a good ring to it from earlier years and the island between Iceland and Spitsbergen, which bears the name of our compatriot Jan Mayen, is a reminder that the Dutch were not strangers here in earlier centuries.⁷

In response, Van Hamel writes:

With regard to the especially warm applause that was accorded to the Dutch flag at the Icelandic millennium celebrations when mr. Knottenbelt was about to speak, your correspondent notes that he does not know to what this special affection should be attributed. Anyone familiar with the lead-up to this visit to Iceland by two members of our States General can easily guess the reason for this warm welcome. And others may be interested to learn about it. In the summer of 1929 at every Icelandic home, however remote, people would ask the Dutch visitor why his country was the only one that had refused to send delegates to next year's celebrations. They were not

directly offended by this, but deeply regretted it and found such rigid formalism incomprehensible. For the standing rules of the Houses of Parliament do not provide for external representation. Of course, this rule was never intended for cases like this, but they stuck to it and all the efforts by our envoy in Copenhagen could not bring The Hague to change its mind. Yet in doing so, they spoiled our relations with a nation that will certainly play a much more important part in the world in the near future than in the recent past. Fortunately – in this case just in time – they abandoned their obstinacy and decided not to be the only ones to fail to attend by the end of 1929. With their warm applause, the Icelanders surely wished to express their satisfaction that representatives of a people, with whom they are closely related and with whom they have many historical ties, had come in the end. It is typically Icelandic not to hold grudges, but to doubly appreciate someone who admits he was wrong.⁸

Van Hamel himself had actually written a poem in Icelandic for the occasion, and he had done so in *dróttkvætt*, a difficult metre from Old Norse skaldic poetry. On 28 December 1929, he had asked Sigurður Nordal to check his text and correct it if necessary.⁹ After Dutch journalist Marcus van Blankenstein¹⁰ had delivered an address and presented a handwritten, calligraphic copy of the poem as well as a watercolour painting to the Icelandic parliament on behalf of Dutch experts in Icelandic, Van Hamel recited his poem. Since Blankenstein held a doctorate in Indo-European linguistics, he and Van Hamel

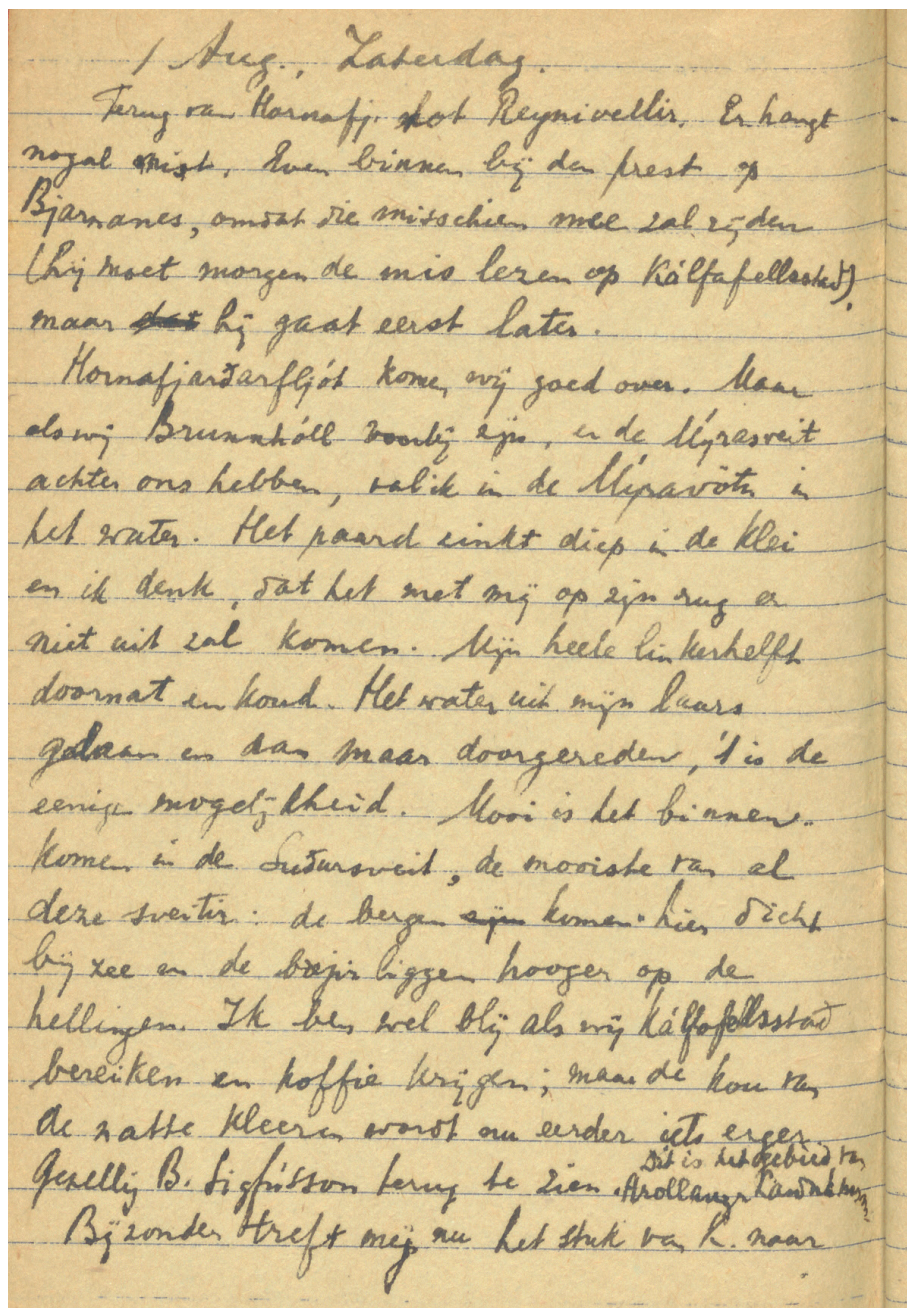
IJslandsche nationale kunsten en sporten vertoonen. Men zal er laten zien, hoe de van ouds beroemde gastvrijheid ook onder de hedendaagschen IJslanders nog altijd levende is. Gasten uit vele landen worden verwacht. De eerste plaats onder dezen zullen de vertegenwoordigers der parlementen van de West- en Midden-Europeesche staten, als mede van Noord-Amerika, innemen, die een uitnodiging om deze plechtigheid bij te wonen, ontvangen hebben. Men meende namelijk de stichting van het oudste nog levende parlement niet beter te kunnen vieren dan in bijzijn van afgevaardigden van de parlementen der bevriende staten. De gracieuze uitnodiging om vertegenwoordigers te zenden, werd ook even gracieus door alle mogendheden aangenomen. Door alle op één na. De Nederlandsche Kamers wezen haar af. Iedere IJslander weet dat en heeft daar den mond vol over. 'De reden, die zij opgeven, is, dat hun wet het hun niet toestaat', voegt hij eraan toe. Bij nader onderzoek bleek mij echter, dat het formeel bezwaar gelegen is in het reglement van orde onzer Tweede Kamer, dat geen vertegenwoordiging naar buiten veroorlooft. Verstandig – om ideële motieven erbuiten te laten – is deze formalistische houding zeker niet. Bij een gelegenheid als deze de eenige te zijn die ontbreekt, werkt nadeelig. Zelfs in Westminster en in Washington vindt men een bedevaart naar Thingvellir niet beneden zich. Het hooghartig en stijfhoofdig gebaar van Den Haag zal ons land daar ginds stellig geen vrienden bezorgen. Met wat buigzamer houding zou het die zeker hebben kunnen krijgen, en het zou daarvan slechts voordeel trekken. Want, zooals ook uit het vervolg van dit opstel nog blijken zal, IJsland is een land, waar de behoeften snel toenemen'. See also Van Hamel 1930j and 1930k.

7 NRC, 8-7-1930: 'Nadat de heer Knottenbelt, die namens de Nederlandsche volksvertegenwoordiging het woord zou voeren, was aangekondigd en de Nederlandsche vlag in top verscheen, brak een bijzonder hartelijk applaus los. Waaraan dit moet worden toegeschreven is mij niet bekend. Blijkbaar heeft de Nederlandsche naam uit vroegere jaren nog een goeden klank en het eiland tusschen IJsland en Spitsbergen, dat den naam van onzen landgenoot Jan Mayen draagt, herinnert eraan, dat de Nederlanders in vroegere eeuwen hier geen onbekenden waren'.

8 Van Hamel, letter to the editor, *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 12-7-1930: 'Naar aanleiding van het bijzonder hartelijk applaus, dat de Nederlandsche vlag ten deel viel bij de IJslandsche millennium-feesten, toen mr. Knottenbelt aldaar het woord ging voeren, merkt Uw correspondent op, dat hem onbekend is, waaraan deze bijzondere hartelijkheid moet worden toegeschreven. Wie de voorgeschiedenis van de reis van twee leden onzer Staten-Generaal naar IJsland kent, kan de oorzaak dezer hartelijkheid gemakkelijk gissen. En anderen zal het wellicht interesseeren haar te vernemen. In den zomer van 1929 richtte men in ieder IJslandsch huis, hoe afgelegen ook, de vraag tot den Nederlandschen bezoeker, waarom zijn land het eenige was, dat geweigerd had afgevaardigden naar de feesten van het volgend jaar te zenden. Men was daardoor niet direct gekrenkt, doch men betreurde het diep en vond zulk een stijf formalisme onbegrijpelijk. Het reglement van orde der Kamers kent namelijk geen vertegenwoordiging naar buiten. Die regel is natuurlijk nooit voor gevallen als dit bedoeld geweest, maar men klampte zich eraan vast en alle inspanning van onze gezant te Kopenhagen kon Den Haag niet tot beter inzicht brengen. Toch bedierf men zoo de verhouding met een volk, dat in de naaste toekomst zeker een veel belangrijker rol in de wereld zal spelen dan in het jongste verleden. Gelukkig dat men – ditmaal nog net voordat het te laat was – in het eind van 1929 zijn halsstarrigheid liet varen en besloot toch niet de eenige afwezige te zullen zijn. Met het hartelijke applaus hebben de IJslanders stellig hun voldoening erover willen uitdrukken, dat er ten slotte toch nog vertegenwoordigers gekomen waren van een volk, dat hun na verwant is en waarmee zij veel historische banden hebben. Het is typisch IJslandsch om niet te blijven wrakken, maar iemand die ongelijk bekent, dubbel te waardeeren'.

9 Quak 2018, 341.

10 Markus van Blankenstein (1880-1964) studied Dutch literature at Leiden University, where he successfully defended his dissertation *Untersuchungen zu den langen Vokalen in der ě-Reihe. Ein Beitrag zur Lehre des indogermanischen Ablauts* (1911). He started his career as a journalist in 1906 at the NRC and was that newspaper's Berlin correspondent from 1909 to 1920.



◀ Fig. 1. Van Hamel's 1931 travel diary. Utrecht, University Library, Archief Van Hamel, A 31, p. 16.

presumably knew each other personally. Blankenstein delivered his address on 28 June 1930, and even spoke some Icelandic on this occasion, as appears from the account by Jónsson and by the journalist of the *Algemeen Dagblad*.¹¹ The poem was reproduced by Jónsson:

1. Frjálsir menn um haf þér heilsa
 hróðurorðum, þjóð í norðri,
 hjartans óskir heilar birta.
 Hönd er rétt frá Niðurlöndum.
 5. Ísland, tókst fyrir árum þúsund,
 ættum dýra, frelsistýrið,
 aðrir fylgðu, alltaf feðra
 arfi haldi synir djarfir.

The free translation provided by the journalist of the *Algemeen Dagblad* – which presumably goes back to Van Hamel himself – reads:

1. Free men from across the sea send you,
 Renowned people in the North, words of greeting.
 They speak words of heartfelt congratulations
 A hand extended from the Netherlands.
 5. A thousand years ago Iceland took
 The governance of its freedom
 Into its own hands. Others followed;
 May vigilant sons ever
 Maintain the heritage of their fathers.¹²

¹¹ Jónsson 1943, 299–300.

¹² NRC, 8-7-1930: 'Vrije mannen van over zee zenden U, roemrijk volk in het Noorden, woorden van groet. Zij spreken woorden van hartelijke gelukwens uit, een hand uitgestoken uit Nederland. Duizend jaar geleden nam IJsland het bestuur van zijn vrijheid zelf in handen. Anderen volgden; mogen steeds wakkere zonen het erfgoed der vaderen handhaven.'

It is at any rate clear from this that Van Hamel did his very best to strengthen ties between Iceland and the Netherlands.

Study trips

In 1931, Van Hamel was in Iceland once again, this time visiting the south-east coast, as evidenced by a notebook in his archives at Utrecht University Library. It describes in minute detail how he set off from Efri Hvöll by car and travels, mainly on horseback, via the foothills of Vatnajökull to Hornafjörður: 'One crosses the glacier here, as the Jökulsá [river] is impassable. We have two pickaxes at the ready to carve a path: the glacier is not hard for a man [to traverse], but it is for the horse, which does not easily cross crevasses (gjá)'.¹³ It is characteristic of these notes that he uses Icelandic designations for elements in the landscape, such as *gjá* 'chasm, crevasse'. Van Hamel's interest is not restricted to the landscape, but also extends to the people he encounters, with whom he appears to have had many conversations. For example, he records, that 'Sigurður [Arason of Fagurhólmsmýri] tells, that in the sveit ['region'] there are still memories (munir, so probably objects) of a Dutch ship that got stranded in 1667: descendants of some of the crew still on Hnappavellir, must relate this to M. Simon Thomas'.^{14,15} He adds this in a later footnote: 'The story of this ship is found in Jón Espolin, Íslands Árbækur í sögn-formi, vol. 7, Kaupm. 1827, p. 50. I have seen this in Breiðbólstað'.¹⁶ Van Hamel also approvingly mentions that the farmers, with whom he is travelling, know their sagas inside out, especially those relating to their own area – 'here the Njála' – and know the stories associated to each and every place they visit.¹⁷

Van Hamel remained actively involved in strengthening the bonds between Iceland and the Netherlands after 1930 as well. He tried to increase contacts between the two countries, and one of the ways he did this was by organising study trips to Iceland. From 1931 onwards, he was involved in organising summer camps in Iceland. Farmers in Iceland were short on farm hands to bring in the hay, and Van Hamel tried to alleviate this shortage by bringing in Dutch students. He had gotten in touch with the *Studentenwerkkamp* ('student work camp') in the Netherlands and subsequently received 200 applications (including 60 female students) to go haying in Iceland. Thirty-three students actually went, as reported in *Het Volk* of 25 June 1932. Through these

summer camps, Dutch students could stay with farmers in Iceland over the summer months on condition that they helped out on the farm. This thus provided students a unique opportunity to get to know the country, people and language directly. From 1932 onwards, some 25 students headed for the island in the Atlantic Ocean every year. These visits were also covered by the Dutch press, as some students reported on their experiences in Dutch newspapers and magazines. In 1932, Van Hamel said in an interview in *De Banier* (6 September 1932):

I spoke with all the farmers, with whom the 32 students had been employed, and this often involved long journeys. In doing so, I found that the population was extremely satisfied with the work done by our students. The Dutch therefore left a good impression and one has the feeling that the Icelanders hope to benefit from this help again next year. This good rapport and cooperation is probably due in part to the fact that the two peoples have an easy feel for each other. There has been no awkwardness or stiffness. Conversely, the Icelandic people did what they could for the students. Everywhere they were met with a warm welcome, for Icelandic hospitality is truly one of a kind. In addition to this useful side of the trip for the Icelanders, which was, of course, also of value to the visitors themselves because it is important for them to get to work in a different environment for once, the trip also had a scientific dimension. And this too was very useful. The students of Icelandic had a valuable practical exercise. They learned a tremendous amount as a result, and their knowledge of Icelandic life and the character of the Icelanders means that their further studies will be grounded on a much firmer foundation. But students of other subjects also owe a lot to this trip from a scientific point of view. Such is the case, for instance, for those studying natural sciences. The students from Leiden, for example, had been given special assignments to complete. In particular, it is worth mentioning that a volcano was climbed, which otherwise hardly anyone ever visits, namely the Laki. Collections of stones, birds, fish and plants were brought back to the Netherlands, which will find a place in various Dutch laboratories. The human benefit of this trip has also been very great. The participants got an insight into the characteristics of a people, of which we have already mentioned hospitality. Furthermore,

¹³ UBU, Archief Van Hamel, A 31, p. 10: 'Men gaat hier over den gletscher, daar de Jökulsá niet te doorwaden is. Er liggen twee houweelen klaar, om een pad te hakken: voor de mensch is de gletscher niet moeilijk, maar wel voor het paard, dat niet gemakkelijk over spleten stapt (gjá)'.

¹⁴ Maria Simon Thomas (1901-1955) defended her dissertation *Onze IJslandvaarders in 17e en 18e eeuw* ('Our seamen who went to Iceland in the 17th and 18th centuries') (Amsterdam 1935), supervised by Van Hamel, a few years later. It is also characteristic of Van Hamel that he always made an effort to help his doctoral students using the information he gathered on his travels through Iceland.

¹⁵ UBU, Archief Van Hamel, A 31, p. 17: 'Sigurður [Arason van Fagurhólmsmýri] vertelt, dat in de sveit ['streek'] nog herinneringen (munir, ws. dus voorwerpen) bestaan aan de stranding van een Holl. schip in 1667: afstammelingen van sommigen van de bemanning nog op Hnappavellir, dit aan M. Simon Thomas zeggen'.

¹⁶ UBU, Archief Van Hamel, A 31: 'Het verhaal van dit schip staat bij Jón Espolin, Íslands Árbækur í sögn-formi, dl. 7, Kaupm. 1827, p. 50. Ik heb dit op Breiðbólstað gezien'.

¹⁷ UBU, Archief Van Hamel, A 31, p. 25: 'hier de Njála'. He is referring here to *Njáls saga*, which deals with events in the decades around the year 1000.

the people are extremely kind-hearted and display a noble sense of brotherhood, allowing for a true sense of kinship to arise.¹⁸

The value of these summer camps is also evident from the reactions of some students in the Dutch press. For example, Paula Sluyter wrote in *De Tijd* of 10 February 1933 about her experiences as a milkmaid on a farm in Iceland:

Very briefly, I will try to give you some idea of the work we girls did in Iceland. The main and most enjoyable job was haymaking. Such a healthy exercise, together with people like the Icelanders and in the middle of wide, grand surroundings, was an incredible delight. On rainy days, we helped the “húsfreyja” with the usual household chores, i.e. washing, ironing, darning stockings, etc. And then, usually at 7 o'clock in the evening, after drinking coffee, I went home from the field to milk. In a spare pair of old overalls and with milk churn, sieve and bucket, I went to the stables. It was a bit disappointing that they don't milk outside on Iceland! Soon I was no longer bothered by the cow's disdainful look. There was always some difficulty if one of them got it into its head to walk down the road to the meadow though! But all the difficulties that had to be overcome could not outweigh the satisfaction with which I could reply to the farmer afterwards: I milked 3 1/2 cows (there were 9, but this was my maximum). – For everything I saw, enjoyed and learned on Iceland, I would like to thank Professor van Hamel and the “Nederlandsch Studenten-Werkkamp” wholeheartedly.¹⁹

In 1933, another student writes in the journal of the Nederlandse Ornithologische Vereniging ('Dutch Ornithological Society') about the observations she was

able to make during her stay in Iceland in 1932. The account in *De Standaard* of 8 April 1933 by the aforementioned Van Dijk also demonstrates that he had made good note of the flora and fauna found in Iceland as well as the country's geology.

The student work camps also led to the publication of the second Dutch language book on Iceland in the 1930s. The well-known ornithologist and writer Jan P. Strijbos (1891-1963) took part in one of these summer camps and came away so impressed by the country and its inhabitants that he published his own book on Iceland *In het zog van Raven-Flóki* ('In the wake of Hrafna-Flóki') in 1936, with a historical introduction by the then equally well-known Bert W. Garthoff (1913-1997). This book speaks highly of Van Hamel's 1933 book on p. 25 (see below). In a short article in the *Algemeen Handelsblad* of 7 August 1937, reference is again made to these summer camps in Iceland, which were organised under Van Hamel's leadership. That year the World Jamboree was held in Amsterdam and participating Icelandic scouts invited 'all friends of Iceland living in the Netherlands' to attend. There would be a demonstration of the national sport 'glima' (Icelandic wrestling), the boys would sing patriotic songs, and finally there would be an outdoor performance of the founding of the Icelandic Parliament in 930, for which the scouts would be dressed in Viking costumes. Van Hamel also tried to help his doctoral students in the field of (Old) Icelandic language and culture by getting in touch with Icelandic scholars on their behalf. For instance, in his letters to the Icelandic scholars Sigurður Nordal and Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, he asked them to help his doctoral student Jan Spoelstra (1906-after 1946) in his research on outlaws in Old Norse literature. The latter obtained his doctorate on this subject under Van Hamel's supervision in 1938.²⁰

¹⁸ A. G. van Hamel, *De Banier*, 6-9-1932: 'Ik heb gesproken met alle boeren, waarbij de 32 studenten waren te werk gesteld en dat ging vaak met grote reizen gepaard. Daarbij is mij gebleken, dat de bevolking uiterst tevreden was over het werk dat door onze studenten werd verricht. De Nederlanders hebben dan ook een goede indruk achtergelaten en men heeft het gevoel dat de IJslanders hopen volgend jaar weer van deze hulp te kunnen gebruik maken. Deze goede verstandhouding en samenwerking is vermoedelijk mede te danken aan het feit, dat de beide volken elkander gemakkelijk aanvoelen. Men heeft niet met stroefheid noch met stugheid te kampen gehad. Omgekeerd heeft de IJslandse bevolking voor de studenten gedaan wat ze kon. Overal werd men gastvrij onthaald, want de IJslandse gastvrijheid is enig in haar soort. Naast deze nuttige zijde, die de reis voor de IJslanders had, die tenslotte ook weer zijn waarde had voor de bezoekers zelf omdat het van belang is, dat zij ook in andere omgeving de handen eens uit de mouwen steken, had de tocht ook een wetenschappelijke kant. En ook deze heeft veel nut opgeleverd. De studenten in de IJslandse taal hebben een waardevolle praktische oefening gehad. Zij hebben daardoor ontzaglijk veel geleerd en hun kennis van het IJslandse volksleven en volkskarakter maakt dat hun verdere studie op een veel reëler basis zal kunnen rusten. Maar ook studenten in andere vakken danken uit wetenschappelijk oogpunt veel aan deze reis. Dat is bijvoorbeeld het geval met hen die natuurwetenschappen studeren. De studenten uit Leiden bijvoorbeeld hadden speciale opdrachten meegekregen, die konden worden uitgevoerd. In het bijzonder is waard te vermelden dat een vulkaan beklommen werd, waar anders bijna nooit iemand komt, namelijk de Laki. Er zijn naar Nederland verzamelingen stenen, vogels, vissen en planten meegebracht, die in verschillende Nederlandsche laboratoria een plaats zullen vinden. Ook het menselijke nut van dezen tocht is zeer groot geweest. De deelnemers hebben een inzicht gekregen in de karaktereigenschappen van het volk, waarvan wij de gastvrijheid reeds als een der voornaamste noemden. De bevolking is voorts buitengewoon menslievend en toont een edele broederzin te bezitten en zo was het mogelijk dat een ware verbroedering kon ontstaan'.

¹⁹ Paula Sluyter, *De Tijd*, 10-02-1933: 'Heel in het kort wil ik trachten enig idee te geven wat voor werk wij, meisjes, in IJsland verrichtten. Hoofdwerk, en ook 't plezierigst, was wel 't hooien. Zo'n gezonde lichaamsbeweging, samen met mensen als IJslanders en te midden van 'n wijde, grootse omgeving was 'n ongekend genot. Op regendagen hielpen we de „húsfreyja” bij de gewone huiselijke bezigheden, d.i. wassen, mangelen, kousen stoppen, e.d. En dan reed ik meestal 's avonds om 7 uur, na 't koffiedrinken, van 't veld naar huis om te melken. In 'n extra ouwe overall en met melkbus, zeef en emmer, stapte ik stalwaarts. Dat viel wel wat tegen, dat er op IJsland niet buiten wordt gemolken! Spoedig stoorde ik me ook niet meer aan 't minachtend omkijken van 't koebeest. Wel gaf 't altijd enige moeilijkheid als er één 't in z'n hoofd kreeg om de weg naar de wei op te wandelen! Maar alle moeilijkheden die overwonnen moesten worden, wogen toch niet op tegen de voldoening, waarmee ik na afloop de boer kon antwoorden: Ik heb 31/2 koe gemolken (er waren er 9, maar dit was mijn maximum). – Voor alles wat ik op IJsland gezien, genoten en geleerd heb, wil ik, naast Professor van Hamel, ook 't „Nederlandsch Studenten-Werkkamp” van ganser harte bedanken'.

²⁰ Spoelstra 1938.

Iceland: old and new

An important contribution by Van Hamel to the understanding of Iceland in the Dutch-speaking world is his 1933 book, *IJsland: oud en nieuw* ('Iceland: old and new').²¹ In this book, which is clearly based on his own visits to that country in 1929-1932, he sings Iceland's praises. However, he does not merely express his admiration for the country and its people, but also offers the reader a lot of information on the country. As the title suggests, the book is concerned not just with the island's medieval culture and its sagas and Edda, but also with modern Iceland. Van Hamel paints a picture of Iceland's history up to his time and also reports on modern Icelandic literature and culture. Judging by its reviews, the book was well received in the Netherlands, although some criticised its author's tendency to wax lyrical about the country. The book was also appreciated in Iceland, as appears from the review by Guðmundur Finnbogason in the magazine *Skírnir* in 1933. The latter cites a stanza from the Eddic poem *Hávamál* in this context, in which it is said that friends give each other gifts. To his mind, this book was a gift to the Icelanders to thank them for the friendship the author had enjoyed in Iceland. Among the few Icelanders who could read the book in its original language, was the physician and writer Björgúlfur Ólafsson (1882-1973), who had served as an army doctor in the Dutch East Indies from 1914 to 1917. In a letter dated 20 September 1933, he thanks Van Hamel for sending him the book. He also notes that it was unfortunate that so few Icelanders could read the original and suggests that a translation might therefore be worthwhile.²²

In the book, from p. 283 onwards, Van Hamel also discusses Iceland's ancient music, which he believes to be very different from what is common in Europe. He then continues by stating that, as a non-musicologist, he cannot judge whether this music goes back to early medieval church music or whether it originates from the oldest pagan times. He then continues by referring to songs he had heard in the Celtic-speaking part of Ireland and which supposedly bore great similarities to Old Icelandic music. He therefore suspects that the 'primitive music of European man' may have been preserved here.²³ This theory clearly occupied Van Hamel's mind, for both the aforementioned letter from Ólafsson and a letter from Coenraad Lodewijk Walther Boer (1891-1984), musicologist and *kapelmeester* ('band leader') of the Royal Military Band in The Hague, indicate that he asked him for further advice with regard to his ideas on early Icelandic music.²⁴

That Van Hamel was also appreciated as a scholar and friend in Iceland is shown by the fact that he was made an honorary member of *Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag* in 1933. This Icelandic honour even made it into the Dutch press: the newspaper *Het Vaderland* reported on 4 July 1933 that Van Hamel had been made an honorary member and went on to write: 'This society, which was founded in 1816, serves as an academy of sciences in Iceland, and its honorary membership is the highest scientific distinction bestowed in that country. Prof. Van Hamel is the second Dutchman to whom it is conferred; the first was the late prof. R. C. Boer in Amsterdam [in 1916]'.²⁵ It is apparent from his correspondence with Icelandic scholars that Van Hamel had already become an ordinary member of the *félag* in 1930.

Flying high

In the 1930s, Van Hamel kept up his efforts to promote Icelandic culture: articles and lectures are regularly mentioned in newspapers of the time. In 1933, for instance, he gave a lecture on Iceland for the organising committee relating to the deployment of Dutch pilots to an Aerological Station near Reykjavík. The initiative for this deployment originated with the Royal Netherlands Meteorological Institute (KNMI) director and meteorologist dr. Hendrik Gerrit Cannegieter (1879-1964). In 1930, he came up with the idea of using military aircraft to explore the upper reaches of the troposphere in the polar region. The KNMI and the military's Aviation Department (LVA) had already, incidentally at first and permanently from 1917 onwards, entered into a partnership for conducting meteorological operations. On 2 September 1932, two of the Aviation Department's Fokker D.VII aircraft took to the skies from a bumpy field near Reykjavík in Iceland. The first foreign deployment of the Dutch air force was underway. In spite of operating under what were often very harsh weather conditions, the Iceland Detachment carried out its mission. This consisted of conducting high altitude flights of up to 7,000 metres for one year in order to gather meteorological data. The Station was operational from 2 September 1932 to 31 August 1933. In September 1933, the three pilots returned to the Netherlands and were decorated for their services.

One such participant was lieutenant airman J. H. van Giessen, leader of the Aerological Station in Iceland. He held a lecture with slides in Icelandic (!) on 'Aviation and Holland' in Reykjavík in May 1933, for which an admission fee was charged. The proceeds were intended for the families of the crew of the Icelandic trawler *Skúla fogeta*,

²¹ Van Hamel 1933d.

²² UBU, Hs. 19 A 2, see also Jaski 2008.

²³ Van Hamel 1933d, 284: 'primitieve muziek van den Europeeschen mensch'.

²⁴ UBU, Archief Van Hamel G 3B (17-1-1933). This Coenraad Boer was a son of Van Hamel's teacher of Old and Modern Icelandic Richard Constant Boer (1863-1929), a Dutch (Old) germanist, specialising in Old Norse. He obtained his doctorate in 1888 from the University of Groningen on the saga of Örvar-Odd and was a teacher of Dutch and geography at the gymnasium in Leeuwarden from 1888 to 1900, professor of Old Norse at the University of Groningen from 1894 to 1900, and professor of Old Germanic and Sanskrit at the University of Amsterdam from 1900 onwards. In 1921, the study of Scandinavian languages was officially established at the University of Amsterdam and his brief was extended to include the continental Scandinavian languages (Danish, Norwegian and Swedish) and their literatures. See also the contribution by Alderik Blom in this volume.

²⁵ *Het Vaderland*, 4-7-1933: 'Deze Maatschappij, die in 1816 werd opgericht, vervult in IJsland de plaats eener academie van wetenschappen en haar erelidmaatschap is de hoogste wetenschappelijke onderscheiding, welke daar te lande verleend wordt. Prof. Van Hamel is de tweede Nederlander, wien zij te beurt valt; de eerste was wijlen prof. dr. R. C. Boer te Amsterdam [in 1916]'.



◀ Fig. 2. Part of the books relating to Iceland in the Collectie Van Hamel in the Utrecht University Library (photo: Bart Jaski).

which had been lost at sea on 10 April and for which Dutch pilots had scoured the seas for eleven hours to no avail. He also addressed the Icelandic radio, as revealed by a report in the *Leeuwarder Nieuwsblad* of 17 May 1933. His knowledge of Icelandic is also mentioned in the aforementioned letter from Björgúlfur Ólafsson to Van Hamel.

The fact that Iceland was still largely unknown in the Netherlands at the time is evident from a note in the *Gooi- en Eemlander* of 17 October 1930 about a lecture on Iceland at the Volksuniversiteit in Hilversum. The speaker was not a Dutchman himself, but rather one Johannes Velden from Berlin, who, according to the journalist, clearly assumed that many of his listeners had hardly even heard of the country. In their books, Van Hamel and Strijbos also mention that the misconception that Icelanders were part Eskimo still existed in the Netherlands. But the grand celebration of Iceland's thousandth anniversary in 1930 had likely strengthened interest in and knowledge of the country.

In the winter of 1935-1936, an exchange took place between the faculties of Utrecht University and the University of Reykjavík. As part of this, Van Hamel delivered guest lectures on Gothic, Dutch, Old and Middle English and other topics in Iceland, while his Icelandic colleague Alexander Jóhannesson gave guest lectures in Utrecht. On these occasions, the two professors lived in each other's homes in Reykjavík and Utrecht respectively.²⁶

The good relations between the universities in Utrecht and Reykjavík also prompted Van Hamel to propose an exchange of books between the Utrecht and Reykjavík university libraries in February 1936. Van Hamel was keen to expand the Utrecht University Library's Icelandic collection. A list he sent to Guðmundur Finnbogason, then head of the National Library of Iceland, reveals that there were hardly any books printed in Iceland in Utrecht. Van Hamel was particularly interested in acquiring works of modern Icelandic literature.

Henceforth, the Utrecht University Library would send copies of all dissertations and some spare volumes to Reykjavík, and Van Hamel hoped that the Icelandic library would be willing to do the same. The success of the book exchange is attested to in the annual report of the Utrecht University Library, which reports that on the occasion of the 300th anniversary of Utrecht University in 1936, it had been gifted 'an extensive collection of Icelandic literature' by the Icelanders.²⁷ The donation also made the Dutch press. Van Hamel not only gave lectures on Iceland in the 1930s, but also wrote contributions for newspapers and magazines, such as the *Gooi- en Eemlander* in 1937. In addition, he also gave radio lectures on modern Icelandic literature in Dutch broadcaster AVRO's *boekenhalfuur* ('half hour for books').²⁸ For instance, on 21 January 1934 he discussed the Dutch translation of Guðmundur Kamban's book *Skálholt*²⁹ and he talked about Halldor Laxness' novel

²⁶ See Van Hamel's letter from Reykjavík to Jóhannesson in Utrecht of 26 November 1935; Quak 2018, 365-366.

²⁷ See Quak 2018, 349: 'een omvangrijke verzameling IJslandsche literatuur'. The list of 438 titles selected by professor Niels P. Dungal on behalf of the University of Iceland at Reykjavík was published as *Skrá um íslenzkar bækur* in 1936.

²⁸ See also Van Hamel 1936c.

²⁹ Guðmundur Kamban (1888-1945) was an Icelandic playwright and novelist. He made his debut as a playwright in 1914 and authored a number of historical novels such as the series of novels on *Skálholt* (1930-1932).

Sjálfstætt fólk ('Independent people') on 28 May 1939 from 14.00-14.30.³⁰ His correspondence reveals that he kept his Icelandic colleagues similarly informed about books published in the Netherlands relating to Icelandic literature and culture.

The end of his Icelandic interactions

No letters from Van Hamel to Icelandic colleagues survive from the late 1930s. During this period, Van Hamel seems to have been going through a personal crisis, perhaps related to the political situation in Europe. This also leaves a gap in his bibliography. By the time he regained his footing, the Second World War begun and the Germans had occupied the Netherlands. Foreign contacts and publishing opportunities became fewer or even non-existent. Following the crisis sparked by the *loyaliteitsverklaring* ('declaration of loyalty'),³¹ in the spring of 1943, academic proceedings declined rather abruptly. In the academic year 1944-1945, Van Hamel had just a single student. However, in the meantime he continued working and, in addition to articles for *Neophilologus*, for which he served as an editor from 1925 until his death, he produced, among other things, the entry on Celtic literature in volume two of the *Algemene literatuurgeschiedenis* ('General history of literature') (1944).³²

In his final letter to his good friend Alexander Jóhannesson, dated 25 September 1945, Van Hamel expresses his hope that good relations with Iceland can now be

restored. He was longing for news from Iceland, for owing to wartime conditions he had only been able to get information through the magazine *Frjón*, which was published in Copenhagen. He now hoped to be able to start travelling again, although the economic situation would probably prevent him from doing so at first. Just over six months after the liberation of the Netherlands, Van Hamel passed away quite suddenly, at the age of 59, following emergency surgery for an intestinal condition. Upon his death, Alexander Jóhannesson, with whom he had swapped chairs for six months in 1935, wrote an obituary in the Icelandic newspaper *Morgunblaðið* of 5 January 1946, a rare distinction for a Dutchman.

Van Hamel, of course, is best known as a celticist. He was the first serious scholar of this field in the Netherlands. However, as a student of R. C. Boer, for whom he wrote an in memoriam, he was also active in the field of Old Norse, as is clear from his correspondence and from Alderik Blom's contribution in this volume. But what emerges first and foremost from his activities between 1928 and 1939 is his great love for modern Iceland. His 1933 book is the clearest demonstration of this. But it is also apparent from the contributions which he wrote in those years, and the lectures which he gave. He was a tireless propagandist for the country, which he so loved to visit.

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³⁰ Halldór Kiljan Laxness (1902-1998) was an Icelandic writer. Well-known works of his, apart from *Sjálfstætt fólk* ('Independent people'), include *Salka Valka* and *Íslandsklukkan* ('Iceland's bell'). He won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1955.

³¹ The German occupying forces forced students to sign a so-called declaration of loyalty in 1943 in which they declared not to commit acts against the German Reich. If they did not sign this declaration, they were no longer allowed to attend classes.

³² Van Hamel 1944a.

Bibliography of A. G. van Hamel (1886-1945)

COMPILED BY BART JASKI

For this overview of the publications of Anton Gerard van Hamel, good use was made of the list of his celtological publications in Marc Schneiders and Kees Veelenturf, *Celtic studies in the Netherlands: a bibliography* (Dublin 1992) 28-42, nos. 151-257. In the list below, the numbering in *Celtic studies in the Netherlands* is referred to at the end of the relevant entries, using the abbreviation CSN. However, the present list lacks some of the additional information provided in *Celtic studies in the Netherlands*, such as the names of publishers, series titles (with a few exceptions) or other specific information, and the English translation or description of titles in Dutch.¹ There are also some differences in the year under which a given publication is listed.²

In the following list, under any given year, the literature in CSN is usually presented first, followed by his publications in other fields of study. For Van Hamel's publications in Old Germanic studies as well related and other fields, online bibliographies of DBNL and Regesta Imperii have been used, although both do confuse A. G. van Hamel with his uncle A. G. van Hamel (1842-1907).³ I have also drawn from the publications referred to in the contributions by Alderik Blom and Arend Quak in this volume. In addition, many reviews were added to

the list by perusing journals in which Van Hamel published regularly.

CODECS offers a list in which 57 celtological publications by Van Hamel were indexed as of January 2023.⁴ Dennis Groenewegen supplied me with a digital copy of this index, in chronological order, which I was able to use as a starting point for the list below. CODECS also includes links to digital copies of the publications in question whenever possible.

The bibliography published here is intended to supplement the present volume, and does not constitute a definitive bibliography of A. G. van Hamel. It is not sufficiently specific for such a purpose, and further bibliographical studies would be needed to include more detailed information and add any missing publications, e.g. in newspapers.

Abbreviations

English studies = *English studies: a journal of English letters and philology*.

Museum = *Museum: maandblad voor philologie en geschiedenis*.

Propria cures = *Propria cures: Amsterdamsch studenten weekblad*.

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1907-1908b

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1907-1908c

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1908-1909

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1909

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¹ The list in CSN is also preceded by an overview of literature on Van Hamel, most of it written in the wake of his death. See also the introduction to this volume.

² Compare CSN no. 194 (listed under 1924) and what is here 1925a. In CSN, reference is made to the year in which the individual issue of the journal *Museum* was published; here, reference is made to the official publishing date of the volume in which the individual issues were generally compiled. In the case of *Museum*, for example, the 1925 edition (in twelve issues) runs from October 1924 to September 1925. In other journals, issues may instead cover multiple years, e.g. 1907-1908, and this is here adopted whenever this is so indicated in the volume.

³ See <https://www.dbnl.org/auteurs/auteur.php?id=hame001> (accessed on 15-1-2023) and http://opac.regesta-imperii.de/lang_en/autoren.php?name=Hamel%2C+Anton+Gerard+van (accessed on 15-1-2023).

⁴ See [https://codecs.vanhamel.nl/Hamel_\(A._G._van\)](https://codecs.vanhamel.nl/Hamel_(A._G._van)) (accessed on 15-1-2023).

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1910b

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1911a

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1911b

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1911c

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1913c

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1915c

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1915d

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1915e

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1915-1916a

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1915-1916b

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1915-1916d

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1916b

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1916c

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1925-1945

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1926c

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1926d

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1927e

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1927g

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1927h

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1928a

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1928c

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Abbreviations

ATU

Aarne-Thompson-Uther index of folktale types.

CODECS

Collaborative online database and e-resources for Celtic studies: <https://codecs.vanhamel.nl/Home> (accessed on 29-3-2023).

DBNL

Digitale bibliotheek voor de Nederlandse letteren ('Digital library of Dutch literature'): <https://www.dbnl.org/> (accessed on 29-3-2023).

DIL

Dictionary of the Irish language, now eDIL: <https://dil.ie/> (accessed on 29-3-2023).

NA

Nationaal Archief, Den Haag, specifically the documents of and relating to Anton Gerard van Hamel in The Hague, Nationaal Archief, 2.21.081 (Archief van J.A. van Hamel), nos. 290-307.

NLI

National Library of Ireland, specifically the letters from Anton Gerard van Hamel to Richard Irvine Best in Dublin, National Library of Ireland, MS 11004 7 i-iv.

Thes. Pal.

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UBU

Universiteitsbibliotheek Utrecht ('Utrecht University Library').

VH

Anton Gerard van Hamel.